



**CRUEL AND UNUSUAL**

**A VISIT TO GERMANY'S  
MEDIÆVAL CRIME MUSEUM**

**HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON IN WALES**

**CHASE VAULT MYSTERY THE MOVING COFFINS OF BARBADOS**

**SLIPPERY CUSTOMER IS THE LOCH NESS MONSTER A GIANT EEL?**

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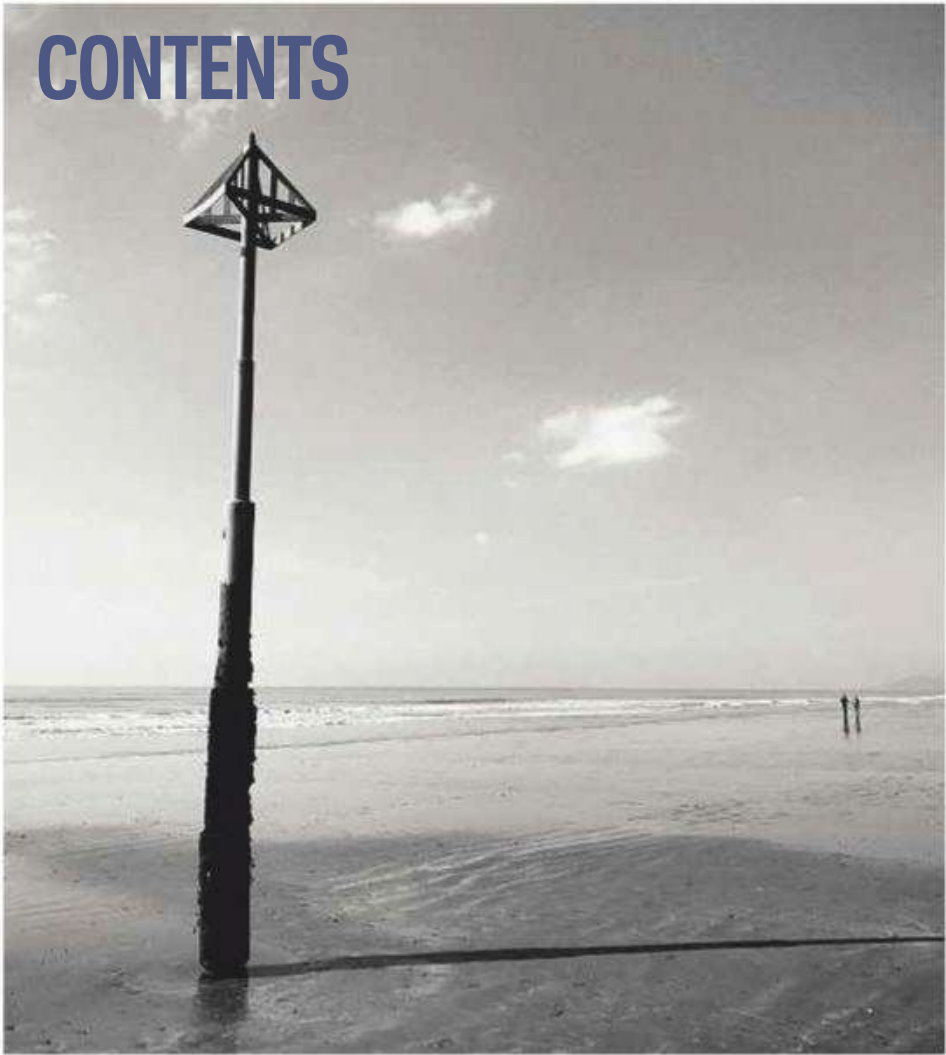
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CONTENTS



EDWARD PARNELL

38 The House on the Borderland: In search of William Hope Hodgson



TRISTAN FEWINGS / GETTY IMAGES FOR SOTHEBY'S

16 Long-lost Lewis Chessman



ANDY BUCHANAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

25 The DNA of Loch Ness



JOHN MILLAR / NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES

6 Giants in the land: Cerne Abbas sex symbol gets a make-over



FORTEAN TIMES 385  
Why fortean ?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE  
78

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: faceless phantoms, Malaysian mass hysteria, Trump versus weather, and more...

- |               |                      |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 14 SCIENCE    | 26 STRANGE CONTINENT |
| 18 GHOSTWATCH | 28 NECROLOG          |
| 24 ALIEN ZOO  | 30 THE UFO FILES     |

FEATURES

32 COVER STORY  
WHERE GHOSTS GATHER

In 1977, Usborne published *World of the Unknown: Ghosts*, the children's book that inspired a generation of junior forteans. Four decades on, the book is back in print... and **BOB FISCHER** tracked down its pleasantly surprised writer, Chris Maynard.

38 THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND

In search of the 'sequestered places' of the British Isles, **EDWARD PARNELL** arrives in Cardiganshire to look for the house in which the neglected master of weird fiction William Hope Hodgson wrote one of his greatest works.

44 THE CHASE VAULT MYSTERY REVISITED

The moving coffins of Barbados have been a staple subject of books on the unexplained for over a century, and yet no one has so far provided a satisfactory solution to the spooky mystery. **BEN RADFORD** thinks we've been looking in the wrong place...

REPORTS

54 BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

The Philadelphia Experiment **HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE**

74 FORTEAN TRAVELLER

Rothenburg's Mediæval Crime Museum **STEVE TOASE**

FORUM

55 Turn to paragraph 400 **RYAN SHIRLOW**

56 A bang on the head **MARK GREENER**

REGULARS

- |              |                |                   |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 02 EDITORIAL | 69 LETTERS     | 79 PHENOMENOMIX   |
| 57 REVIEWS   | 78 READER INFO | 80 STRANGE DEATHS |



**EDITOR**  
DAVID SUTTON  
(drsutton@forteantimes.com)

**FOUNDING EDITORS**  
BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)  
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

**ART DIRECTOR**  
ETIENNE GILFILLAN  
(etienne@forteantimes.com)

**BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR**  
VAL STEVENSON  
(val@forteantimes.com)

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**  
ABIGAIL MASON

**RESIDENT CARTOONIST**  
HUNT EMERSON

**SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES**  
www.managemymags.co.uk  
customercare@subscribe.forteantimes.com

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Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)330 333 9492

**LICENSING & SYNDICATION**  
FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT: Syndication Manager  
RYAN CHAMBERS TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 4027  
ryan\_chambers@dennis.co.uk  
Senior Licensing Manager  
CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3840  
carlotta\_serantoni@dennis.co.uk  
Licensing & Syndication Executive  
NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44 (0) 20 3890 3998  
nicole\_adams@dennis.co.uk

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**PUBLISHER**  
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dennis.co.uk

**CIRCULATION MANAGER**  
JAMES MANGAN  
james.mangan@seymour.co.uk

**EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER**  
GERALDINE GROBLER  
geraldine.grobler@seymour.co.uk

**CREATIVE REPRO ARTWORKER**  
FRANCESCA CINQUEPALMI  
francesca\_cinquepalmi@

**GROUP ADVERTISING DIRECTOR LIFESTYLE**  
ANDREA MASON  
020 3890 3814  
andrea\_mason@dennis.co.uk

**ACCOUNT MANAGER**  
IMOGEN WILLIAMS  
020 3890 3739  
imogen\_williams@dennis.co.uk

**ACCOUNT DIRECTOR**  
JENNIFER BRYAN  
020 3890 3744

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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## WHEN GHOSTS WALK AGAIN

### THE STUFF OF NIGHTMARES

We'd guess that many *FT* readers – at least those who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s – will have fond memories of Usborne's 'World of the Unknown' books, which introduced a young readership to the pleasures of various fortean subjects, from monsters and mythology to vampires and UFOs.

For some reason, though, it was the volume devoted to ghosts that most deeply stirred the imaginations of British children, whose nightmares were henceforth filled with terrifying spectral monks and screaming skulls. *FT* regular Bob Fischer was one such youngster, and in this issue (p32) he explores the impact that *All About Ghosts* had on him and a whole generation of impressionable proto-forteans.

Bob also meets the man behind this legendary compendium of chills, the mild-mannered Christopher Maynard, whose mission was to both entertain and inform, to present the facts and explore different interpretations of them: "I wanted the kids to take something away, and feel that they owned a bit of knowledge, and had an insight into something about the world, an insight that might return fuller and more complete." And in many cases, that seems to be just what happened, with curious readers of Chris's ghost book growing into keen forteans (like Reece Shearsmith, who wrote a foreword for the very welcome new printing of *All About Ghosts*) as they got older. Ashley Thorpe, for example, whose acclaimed film about Borley Rectory is reviewed on p63, noted: "I would never have made my animated film *Borley Rectory* if I hadn't loved this book so much as a child. A wonderful book and ripe for a new generation to discover."

Elsewhere in this issue, which should reach you in good time for Hallowe'en, you can enjoy more suitably spooky fare – from our resident ghostwatcher Alan Murdie exploring the supernatural trope of the faceless phantom to Ben Radford's descent into the creepy Chase Vault, home of the infamous moving coffins of Barbados...

### I KILLED MATT GROENING!

We received a number of letters and emails referring to the premature announcemount of the death of *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening in our last issue (**FT384:4**). For some baffling reason the mistake (arising from a confusion concerning the death of *Simpsons* co-developer Sam Simon back in 2015) was spotted, corrected, and then

nonetheless made it into the final layout before the magazine went to press. A shamefaced Noel Rooney writes:

"In the most recent edition of *Fortean Times* I inadvertently referred to the creator of the *Simpsons* as 'the late' Matt Groening. I sincerely hope that *FT* hasn't started a conspiracy theory about Mr Groening, particularly in an edition that carries an article about precisely that kind of thing happening to various

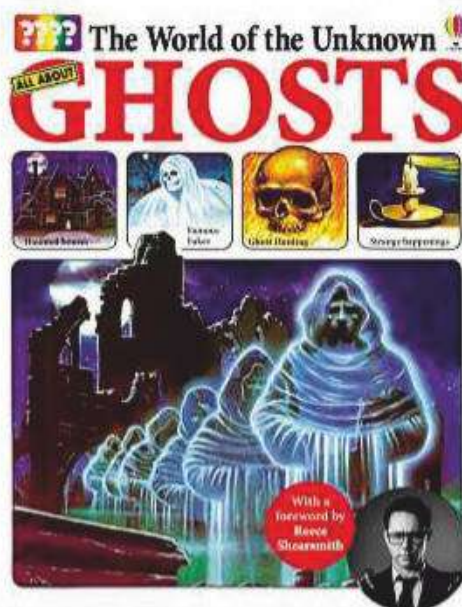
members of the Beatles.

"I trust that the *Simpsons* team are less litigious and more Mark Twain about the whole thing and – who knows? – they might even consider referring to our little blooper on the show (no desperate wannabe plug intended, obviously).

"Matt, I of course meant to refer to you as 'the great' Matt Groening, and I really don't care what some people might say about your toes..."

### ERRATUM

**FT383:50:** Graham Sharp, author of 'Gambling on the Unbelievable', pointed out that the photo captioned "The author and Chris Bonington, about to embark on Yeti Hunt '88" in fact shows "Chris with Ian Bishop of the Natural History Museum, the man who was charged with officially confirming whether Chris returned with the relevant evidence". Graham can be seen on p49 and clearly bears absolutely no resemblance to Mr Bishop.



DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## RE-CHALKING THE CERNE ABBAS GIANT

**LISA GLEDHILL** reports from Dorset on how Britain's biggest sex-symbol has cleaned up his image

What's the first thing you notice about the Cerne Abbas Giant? It's not his lack of ears is it? The giant with his mighty club sustains an entire tourist industry in this quiet corner of Dorset. He appears on postcards, T-shirts and dozens of novelty items, including a wall clock with a disturbingly hypnotic hour-hand. He's probably the only image of a fully erect naked man on uncensored public display in the British Isles.

Like all hill figures, grass, moss and weather erosion gradually obscure his outline, so this summer the National Trust decided to give him a makeover. The re-chalking involves more than 80 volunteers, digging out the cracked and discoloured chalk, then pounding in 17 tonnes of clean crushed chalk to make a fresh surface. This once-in-a-decade event is all done by hand to avoid damaging the hillside and takes around two weeks to complete.

Natalie Holt, Countryside Manager for the National Trust, says: "Re-chalking the Giant is challenging in many ways, not only due to its size but because of the sheer steepness of the slope he's on.

"We are constantly reviewing how best to look after the Giant so that he can be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come.

"When we're happy we've done a really good job of packing the chalk, we will leave him alone – and tamper with him as little as possible – to preserve him for another decade."

It's 99 years since the Pitt-Rivers family gave the giant to the National Trust and the Trust hopes to mark the 100th



anniversary by solving the mystery of his age. Archaeologists will use Optically Stimulated Luminescence tests on parts of the figure which are believed to be undisturbed by later re-cutting, to try and establish when he was originally created.

The earliest definite record of the giant dates from 1694, so some historians believe he is a rude caricature of the land owner Lord Holles, cut by unruly servants while his lordship was away. It seems a lot of trouble to go to for a practical joke but maybe they had more time on their hands in the 17th century. A similar story says that he was cut a century earlier by monks from Cerne Abbey to mock their randy abbot.

Another popular theory is that the giant is a caricature of Oliver Cromwell. Lord Holles was a political opponent of Cromwell whose followers liked to portray him as a "modern Hercules" – so is this giant figure waving a Herculean club with his private parts embarrassingly exposed really the world's biggest

political cartoon?

It's easy to see why many visitors to Cerne Abbas assume the giant is some sort of prehistoric god and there is some circumstantial evidence to support this idea. Iron Age sculptures of similar club-wielding men ready to do battle naked and proud have been found scattered across Europe. Just above the giant's left shoulder sits an unusual square earthwork, probably Iron Age, known as The Trendle. It's smaller than most hill forts so could it be a temple with the chalk figure representing the resident deity? It's at least as likely as some of the other theories.

Whatever his origins, the giant is now popularly seen as a fertility symbol – although he wasn't always as impressively endowed as he is now. Early drawings show the giant used to have a circular belly-button and his erect penis was around 5m (16ft) long – pretty average for a man 60m (200ft) tall. Then, sometime around 1908, the overgrown image was re-cut and the belly button accidentally merged with the penis, extending it to a startling 7m (23ft). But was it really an accident? Maybe the workmen were just having a laugh.

Since at least the beginning of the 20th century, and possibly much further back, couples wanting children have consulted the giant. Early versions of this bit of folklore recommend newlyweds should walk round the giant holding hands. These days the most common tale is that the couple should actually have sex on the giant's member

to guarantee success.

The late sixth Marquess of Bath claimed he and his wife Virginia conceived their daughter after performing "fertility rites" on the giant. The baby was christened Sylvie Cerne and the giant is listed in parish records as her godfather. As recently as 2010, the *Daily Telegraph* claimed the giant was responsible when the Office of National Statistics revealed women in north Dorset had the highest birth rates in the country.

The giant has also become an important symbol for modern pagans. Philip Carr-Gomm, leader of The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, says he is "an image of celebration and reverence for those who are inspired by nature spirituality – whether they are Pagans, Wiccans, Druids or simply people who feel no affinity with conventional religions but find spiritual sustenance in an appreciation of Nature. This spiritual approach affirms the inherent sexuality of life rather than denying it and the Cerne Abbas giant has become an icon for the celebration of fertility and sexuality."

All this presents National Trust staff with some unique challenges above and beyond the usual conservation issues. Erosion caused by trespassers trying to access the ancient monument – for whatever reason – is a genuine problem and anyone caught in the act will be told politely but firmly to put their pants back on and go home.

*For photos of the giant's epic make-over, turn to p6. See also FT69:52, 78:8, 116:18.*





## PHANTOM PYSIOGNOMY

Curious cases  
of ghosts  
without faces

PAGE 18



## BURROWING CATS

In search of a  
curious feline  
cryptid

PAGE 24



## DANCING AT AREA 51

An unusual  
party crowd in  
Rachel, Nevada

PAGE 30

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Are conspiracy theories really on the increase? Is half the world's population mentally ill? Is Tupac still alive? **NOEL ROONEY** has the answers to these and other questions.

### YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE MAD...

It's a commonplace of media agonising over conspiracy theory that the phenomenon is on the rise; that more and more people are coming to believe an increasing number of increasingly bizarre theories – flat Earth, the Moon landing hoax, QAnon, Tupac Shakur is alive and rapping – and thus, the reasoning generally goes, we are all off to Hell in a handbasket, tin foil hats tightly on, wool pulled firmly over our eyes. The main weakness in this argument is that it's not actually true; it appears that conspiracy theories are no more numerous or prevalent than they were 50 (or even 100) years ago. Research by Uscinsky and Parent, for instance, into around 120 years of activity, strongly suggests there is no rising trend. In fact, every piece of research into the burgeoning of conspiracy theory has found that its presence on the political scene is historically constant.

There is some ground for arguing that more people now believe in conspiracy theories, given their popularity in the mainstream media at least; but even this view is suspect, if only because serious research into such beliefs, and representative monitoring of reported beliefs, is a relatively recent enterprise. A scan of recent papers and articles offered the suggestion (consistent with the last 10 to 20 years of research) that around half the population believes in at least one conspiracy, and around one-third of the population is prepared to entertain a (usually narrow) range of conspiracy beliefs, while up to 10 per cent of us can be relied on to adhere to some very strange ideas on a regular basis. The confounding factor in this research is the Internet; the ease with which any kind of rumour can be disseminated online, and particularly via social media, and the clearly temporary, performative vehemence that attaches to such rumours and the reactions to them, does not amount to evidence that

conspiracy theory is on the rise; in fact, it is not a clear indication of anything much, except that social media brings out the worst in a lot of folks.

So does this mean that approximately half the population is mentally ill? I ask this obviously (I sincerely hope) rhetorical question because the other common strand of media theorising on conspiracy theory tends to revolve around the – actually – burgeoning academic industry dedicated to medicalising conspiracy theorists and their adherents. A seemingly endless stream of papers queries whether there is a particular psychological disposition to belief in conspiracy theories, which is another way of saying that half the population is mentally ill, albeit in a niche, specific sort of way. A recent court case has tested this rather loose conjecture, and found it wanting, predictably enough; but, more broadly, can we really take seriously a school of thought that says a specific kind of belief, shared by at least half the population, is indicative of an underlying psychological problem? It's hard to see anything in the current research that could not be applied to any form of belief – in religion, say, or fairies – except of course for the finding that so many of us share an interest in conspiracy theory.

Oh yes, Tupac: it seems he faked his death (as he apparently told his manager he might do) and has since been hiding in Somalia, along with another allegedly deceased rapper called Yaki Kadafi, and has recently posted some rap videos. I'm no expert, but that doesn't look like 20-odd years of moustache evolution to me.

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/american-conspiracy-theories-9780199351800?cc=gb&lang=en&#;www.thesun.co.uk/news/9985461/tupac-alive-conspiracy-theory-latest-2019/;www.antidiscrimination.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/legal-cases/Conspiracy-theory-belief-assumed.aspx>

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES  
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### FIDEL CASTRO'S CROCODILE BITES MAN AT SWEDISH AQUARIUM

BBC News, 21 Aug 2019.

### Mums getting older

Hull Daily Mail, 16 April 2019.

### DUCK IS THE NEW CHICKEN

Toronto Star, 26 May 2019.

### One-legged mayor kicks back at trolls mocking her shoes

D.Telegraph, 6 June 2019.

### HOTEL FALLS OVER

Freemantle (Western Australia) Herald,  
4 Nov 2017.

### 10 million cigs were disguised as frozen chickens

Hull Daily Mail, 6 Feb 2019.

### MATADOR'S USE OF HANDKERCHIEF LEAVES SPANIARDS DIVIDED

Irish Times, 15 May 2019.



# GIANT MAKE-OVER

11 years since his last re-chalking back in 2008, Dorset's 180ft-tall Cerne Abbas Giant was due for a major clean-up, and in late August National Trust rangers, volunteers and locals arrived to begin the work, which included weeding, re-edging, and digging out the faded old chalk and replacing it. For Lisa Gledhill's full report, see p4.

PHOTOS: John Millar / National Trust Images.









## SIDELINES...

### POLICE POLT?

Ghost hunters exploring an ex-police station in Accrington, Lancashire, with stars of TV's *Most Haunted*, had to be rescued from a cell by firefighters after being mysteriously locked in – despite the lock being disabled. *Metro*, 29 July 2019.

### JIHADISTS MOCKED

Al-Qaeda has released embarrassing outtakes from a 2017 Daesh propaganda video of fighters in Yemen in order to undermine its bitter rival. The 'blooper' reel shows a kneeling jihadist trying to renew his pledge of allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakh al-Baghdadi, but repeatedly being interrupted by a squawking bird in the tree above. *D.Telegraph*, 16 Aug 2019.

### SNOUT'S HONOUR

Uzair Farooq, 10, has set a record for blowing up a jeep tyre with his nose in under a minute, in Pakistan. *Sun*, 20 June 2019.

### CRAZY WHITE RATS

The small village of Gattolino in the Italian province of Cesena suffered an invasion of "crazy white rats", which had been jumping in front of cars and killing each other. They appeared to have come from an old pigeon breeding enclosure that had been closed last year. A special task force was raised to deal with the plague. Gattolino translates roughly as "little cat". *Guardian*, 25 Jan 2019.

### GHOSTS HOUNDED

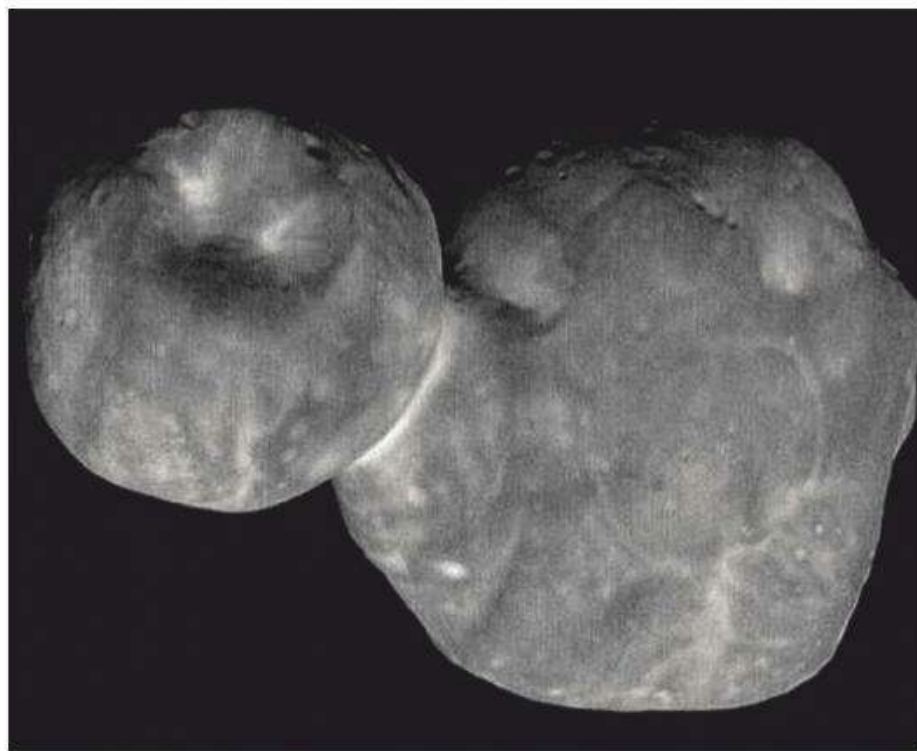
Border collie Basil, 14, sniffs out ghosts at haunted locations by barking and growling, according to owner Ian Wood, 53, from Leyland in Lancashire. *Sun*, *D.Star*, 28 May 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

## ASTRAL BULLETIN

Interstellar objects, Martian water, and tardigrades on the Moon...



NASA

ABOVE: The small, ice-covered object 2014 MU69, also dubbed 'Ultima Thule', is the furthest object ever explored by humankind, being four billion miles away from Earth.

- The mysterious cigar-shaped interstellar object known as 'Oumuamua (or 1I/2017 U1) [FT362:24-25, 363:13] continues to intrigue. At the end of 2018, NASA's infrared Spitzer Space Telescope was expected to track 'Oumuamua as its trajectory brought it close. Strangely, however, the elongated traveller managed to slip past the space telescope unnoticed. 'Oumuamua (whose Hawaiian, roughly translated, means "distant messenger from the past") was first noticed in our Solar System in October 2018, and is the first confirmed visitor from another star.

'Oumuamua is about 10 times as long as it is wide. No known asteroid or comet from our Solar System has such a large ratio between length and width. The most elongated objects seen to date have been no more than three times longer than their width. Another peculiar characteristic of 'Oumuamua is its habit of acceleration and deceleration; asteroids shouldn't do this. It is possible for comets to accelerate, if they vent gas – but in such cases, there should be a visible tail, and the object's spin should be affected; neither of which was observed. Altogether, 'Oumuamua is so unusual that at least one

### It is the furthest object ever explored by humankind

astronomer (Professor Avi Loeb of Harvard) has suggested it to be a discarded piece from an alien spacecraft.

- Another strange space object was discovered at the beginning of 2019 when the NASA probe New Horizons transmitted images of a minor planet about 22 miles (35km) long and nine miles (14km) wide back to Earth. Composed of ice, the small object officially designated 2014 MU69 has been named Ultima Thule. It is the furthest object ever explored by humankind to date, being four billion miles (6.5 billion km) away from Earth in the Kuiper Belt, beyond Pluto. New Horizons got as close as 2,200 miles (3,540km) in order to capture the images. Originally formed of two pieces of ice that fused together, Ultima Thule has been in deep-freeze preservation since our Solar System was formed some 4.5 billion years

ago, and is thus a valuable relic that may hold clues to the origin of other planets. Wits have compared it to a peanut or a snowman because of its bizarre shape.

- In contrast to Ultima Thule's size, astronomers recently discovered a "monster" planet, NGTS-1b, as big as Jupiter. It orbits a red dwarf star 600 light years away, half the size of our Sun, which is so small in comparison to NGTS-1b that the discovery has compelled scientists to review previously held theories; it was believed that massive planets like this one were too large to be associated with such small stars.

- An even more distant trans-Neptunian object than Ultima Thule was detected in 2018, when astronomers, searching the farthest reaches of our Solar System for the elusive 'Ninth Planet', spotted something spherical, around 310 miles (500km) across, and with a pinkish hue (suggesting it is composed of ice). Provisionally designated 2018 VG18, it has been nicknamed Farout, since it is 12 billion miles (19 billion km) away and thus the farthest known object in our Solar System. Distances like this within the Solar System or around other stars are also measured in astronomical units (AU), where one AU = 93 million miles (150 million km), being roughly the Earth's distance from the Sun. Thus, Farout is 125 AU away. That is three-and-a-half times further away than Pluto; Farout takes 1,000 years to orbit the Sun.

- In other Solar System news, and much closer, NASA's Curiosity rover continues to explore Mars. There was much excitement in 2015 at the discovery of lines on the planet's surface, as these were thought to be dried-up water channels (echoes of Schiaparelli's Martian canals). The latest thinking is that dry, steep flows of sand created these fissures rather than water. However, in 2018





Curiosity located organic matter (buried beneath Mars's surface in three-billion-year-old sediments), and a lake inside the Gale Crater, both suggesting that the planet could once have sustained life.

- The Moon, too, may once have supported life, shortly after its birth four billion years ago and again during a peak in lunar activity half a billion years ago. At both times the Moon is thought to have emitted large amounts of superheated gas and water vapour from its interior, which could have enveloped it in an atmosphere suitable for simple life, with pools of liquid forming on its surface. Oddly enough, humans may have inadvertently introduced (or reintroduced) life to the Moon this year, when an Israeli probe crashed in April. Scientists are now hypothesising that some of the several thousand tardigrades (aka 'moss piglets' or 'water bears') on board Beresheet, the Israeli craft, may have survived the crash.

The microscopic, multicellular invertebrates, around 1mm in length, are known to be exceptionally durable, able to withstand temperatures as high as 150°C (302°F) or as low as absolute zero, and were the first creatures to survive in space during an experiment 12 years ago. Experts say they could survive on the Moon for up to 30 years. In effect, this is a modern variant of the venerable panspermia theory made famous by Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe [see FT277:32-37]. Broadly stated, panspermia hypotheses

regards life as having been disseminated throughout the Universe via space dust, meteoroids, asteroids, comets, ... and spacecraft.

Those hardy tardigrades were again in the news recently, featuring in new University of Edinburgh research exploring an aspect of the panspermia hypothesis. The study found that fast-moving streams of interplanetary dust are able to distribute tiny organisms (such as tardigrades) capable of surviving in space. Tardigrades have been found 100 miles (160km) above the Earth's surface, and it is thought that flows of space dust moving at speeds of 43 miles (69km) per second are able to dislodge the microorganisms from a planet's gravitational pull, sending them into space.

- Elsewhere in the galaxy, a planet the same size as Earth and with a similar surface temperature has been discovered. Ross 128b orbits a red dwarf 11 light years away; its climate is thought to be "mild", between -60°C/-100°F (the coldest temperature recorded on Earth is -89°C/-164°F at Antarctica) and a more comfortable 20°C (68°F). It may have evolved oceans and lakes. Astronomers have also discovered a further two potentially habitable planets, possibly suitable for colonisation. The rocky pair belong to a Solar System of four planets orbiting Tau Ceti, our nearest Sun-like neighbour. The planets are 12 light years away, and are thus visible to the naked eye.

- Given that scientists continue to find planets having at least the potential to support life, it is intriguing to hear that mysterious radio signals emanating from deep space were discovered in January 2019. A Canadian telescope picked up 13 fast radio bursts (FRBs), a very unusual repeating signal of millisecond flashes coming from the same source, about 1.5 billion light years away. Designated FRB 180184, such an event has only been recorded once before in 2012, FRB 121102. Several theories have been proposed to explain these repeated blasts of radio waves. These include: a neutron star with a very strong magnetic field, spinning very rapidly; two neutron stars merging together; a blitzar (a rapidly spinning neutron star that collapses under its own weight); or a collapsing black hole. Alternatively, some have suggested that the signals emanate from an alien spacecraft or other extra-terrestrial activity. Watch the skies!

*D.Mirror, 10 Aug 2017; Western Mail, 1 Nov 2017; Dundee Courier and Advertiser, 16 Nov 2017; D.Telegraph, 10 Aug, 21 Nov 2017, 8 June 2018; bgr.com, 5 Nov 2018; Times, 7 Nov 2018; D.Express, 16 Nov 2017, 29 July 2018; Metro, 13 Dec 2018; D.Mail, 10 Aug, 23 Nov 2017, 21 Dec 2018; 2 Jan 2019; BBC News, 2+9+10 Jan; Manchester Evening News, 11 Jan; New Scientist, 12 Jan; Sun, 8 Aug 2019; solarsystem.nasa.gov/asteroids-comets-and-meteors/comets/oumuamua/in-depth, 9 Aug 2019.*

**Christopher Josiffe**

## SIDELINES...

### SONIC BOOM IN CORNWALL

A 2.2R earthquake struck an area southwest of Falmouth, Cornwall, at around 6pm on 8 August. A witness reported the event as a "loud bang from beneath" and said that the windows shook. Others described it as a "sonic boom". The British Geological Survey said that every year there are 15 quakes in Britain of this size or greater. *Guardian, D.Telegraph, 10 Aug 2019.*

### DEER OH DEER

A deer crashed through a taxi's windscreen at such speed that it ended up dead in the boot. It narrowly missed cabbie Shaun Stoodley, leaving him covered in glass and blood. The deer was first hit by a vehicle going the other way in Andover, Hampshire. It bounced off the bonnet of Shaun's Ford Galaxy before catapulting through the windscreen. *Sun, 15 May 2019.*

### POLISHED TURDS

Artist Coleman Larkin is marketing "Derby Turds" for \$200 a jar – resin-coated poop from the 1997 Kentucky Derby winner, Silver Charm. All proceeds go to Old Friends Farm in Georgetown, a thoroughbred retirement facility Silver Charm calls home. *[AP] 3 May 2019.*

### GOLDFUNGUS

A fungus that draws gold from its surroundings has been discovered in Western Australia, and could signal new deposits. Found near Bodington, south of Perth, the strain of *Fusarium oxysporum* attaches gold to its strands by dissolving and precipitating particles from its environment. *(Queensland) Courier Mail, 25 May 2019.*

### BEAR WITH US

A black bear was found sleeping in a wardrobe in a house in Butler Creek, Montana. Police said it just yawned when officers knocked on the window to wake it up. It eventually had to be tranquilised and removed. The bear had somehow entered a laundry room and managed to bolt the door from the inside. It began ripping the room apart before apparently feeling tired and climbing into the wardrobe for a nap. *BBC News, 22 June 2019.*

DOTTED ZEBRA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



**ABOVE:** Water bears in space? Scientists believe humans may have introduced life to the Moon after the crash of an Israeli probe carrying a cargo of tardigrades. Meanwhile, the microscopic 'moss piglets' may also be travelling on streams of interstellar dust.





## SIDELINES...

### BEAR WRECKS CAR #1

On 4 July, a bear opened a car door in Boulder, Colorado, got stuck inside, tore the interior apart, and shifted the gears into neutral. The car rolled about 100ft (30m) down a hill, swiping a tree and rendering it undrivable. A door then popped open and the bear fled. *thedaily-beast.com*, 5 July 2019.

### BEAR WRECKS CAR #2

In Humboldt County, California, a bear either fell or jumped on the bonnet of a police car, smashing the windscreen. The car hit an embankment, rolled over and caught fire. Patrolman and bear escaped uninjured. The car was gutted and the fire burnt half an acre of vegetation. *Sunday People*, 11 Aug 2019.

### BEYOND HELP

RSPCA inspector Ellie Burt was called out to multiple reports of a "lethargic and collapsed" fox in Exeter, Devon – and found it was a stuffed toy. *Sun*, 12 April 2019.

### MASS EXORCISM

On 13 July, the Catholic bishop of Buenaventura in Colombia planned to spray holy water over the city from a military helicopter to conquer the demons he believes are plaguing the city. Buenaventura, the country's biggest Pacific seaport, is notorious for drug trafficking and the violence waged by criminal gangs. The exorcism by Monsignor Rubén Darío Jaramillo Montoya was planned to coincide with the feast day of St Bonaventure, the city's patron saint. *catholicherald.co.uk*, 10 July; *independent.co.uk*, 11 July 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

## ALL FALL DOWN AGAIN | More from the world's 'mass hysteria capital'



ABOVE: Ketereh national secondary school, home to the latest in a long line of mass psychogenic illness outbreaks in Malaysia.

On a quiet Friday morning in July last year pandemonium broke out at the Ketereh national secondary school (SMK Ketereh) in the village of Padang Lembek in Kelantan, north-east Malaysia. Siti Nurannisaa, 17, was the trigger. "The assembly bells rang," she recalled. "I was at my desk feeling sleepy when I felt a hard, sharp tap on my shoulder. I turned round to see who it was and the room went dark. Fear overtook me. I felt a sharp, splitting pain in my back and my head started spinning. I fell to the floor. Before I knew it, I was looking into the 'otherworld'. Scenes of blood, gore and violence. The scariest thing I saw was a face of pure evil. It was haunting me, I couldn't escape. I opened my mouth and tried to scream but no sound came out. I passed out."

Her best friend Rusydiah Roslan recalled: "Siti was screaming uncontrollably. No one knew what to do. We were afraid to even touch her." Within minutes students in other classrooms started screaming, their frantic cries ricocheting through the halls. One girl fainted after claiming to have seen the same "dark figure". Classroom doors slammed shut as panicked

teachers and students barricaded themselves in. Islamic spiritual healers were called to perform mass prayer sessions. By the end of the day, 39 people had been affected.

It was another dramatic example of mass psychogenic illness ("mass hysteria" in popular parlance), often recorded in these pages: the rapid spread of physical symptoms such as hyperventilation and twitching among a substantial group of people, with no plausible organic cause. Robert Bartholomew, the American medical sociologist who has studied the phenomenon in detail, describes it as "a collective stress response prompting an overstimulation of the nervous system. Think of it as a software problem." He calls Malaysia "the mass hysteria capital of the world. It is a deeply religious and spiritual country where many people, especially those from rural and conservative states, believe in the powers of traditional folklore and the supernatural."

Incidents in Malaysia were particularly prevalent among factory workers during the 1960s, but today it largely affects children in schools and dormitories. Cases have involved adolescent girls from

the Malay Muslim ethnic majority more than any other group. In April 2016, for instance, there were outbreaks across many schools in Kelantan (for a detailed report, see "Malaysian Malaise" by Bob Rickard, **FT342:17-20**) and all schools in the state were closed. Kelantan is the most religiously conservative of all Malaysian states, and most prone to outbreaks. "The symptoms experienced are real," says psychiatrist Dr Simon Wessel: "fainting, palpitations, headaches, nausea, shaking and even fits." Transmission, he adds, "is largely due to psychological and social factors". Siti said she felt stressed during her final school year in 2018, when all-important examinations loomed. "I was preparing for weeks, trying to memorise my notes but something was wrong," she says. "It felt like nothing was going into my head." *BBC News*, 11 Aug 2019.

There are far too many FT reports on mass hysteria outbreaks to list here. For general features on the subject by Bob Rickard and Bob Bartholomew, see **FT253:30-37**, **316:36-40**. Also, for the famous mass fainting of marching bands in Hollinwell, Nottinghamshire, in 1980, see **FT266:44-48**.





## HEALTH HAZARDS | Thai 'magic cards' are radioactive; alien contactee turns bombmaker



ABOVE LEFT: Dr Weerachai Phutdhawong with one of the radioactive cards. ABOVE RIGHT: David R Oxenreider: bombmaking for ET.

### MAGIC CARDS

Plastic cards being sold in Thailand as a cure-all for diseases have been found to emit dangerously high levels of radiation. Produced by a company called Expert Pro Network, the cards were being bought in the northeastern province of Khon Kaen for up to 1,500 baht (£38) by locals, who put them on different parts of their bodies or dipped them in drinking water. However, the Office of Atoms for Peace (OAP), Thailand's nuclear research department, found some of the cards were emitting radiation at about 40 microsieverts per hour – up to 350 times the safe limit for humans. Subsequent X-rays showed they had uranium and thorium spread across their surface. Thai chemist Weerachai Phutdhawong found the radioactive elements in white powder compressed between the two sheets of plastic when he cut a card in half.

The cards displayed a title in Indonesian reading “Magic Card” with the tag-line “Health, fuel, electricity” beneath. As well as an ID number, they claimed to be developed using

“Germany technology” and had the stamp of the World Peace Gong, a symbol to promote peace devised by Indonesia in the wake of the 2002 Bali bombings. The cards carried no information about their claimed medicinal properties, but the company supplying them told villagers they emitted “power” that could help boost health. *bangkokpost.com*, 17 June; *independent.co.uk*, 19 June 2019.

### ALIEN WARNING

On 23 June, Charles Kline, manager of Bahney House hotel in Myerstown, Pennsylvania, called police to tell them that David R Oxenreider, 28, had a homemade bomb in his room. Kline had told the hotel guest to remove the bomb, and he complied, placing it outside near a dumpster. Police arrived on the scene soon after and arrested Oxenreider without incident. The bomb consisted of two metal butane tanks taped together and placed in a green bag; the tanks were wrapped in cloth and filled with metal staples. Oxenreider had also placed a hatchet and phone charger inside the bag, possibly,

along with the staples, to act as shrapnel if the bomb were to explode. The bomb needed to be manually detonated, he said, although it might explode if left out in the heat.

Oxenreider said he never intended to hurt anyone; he constructed the device to get the attention of police to warn them of an imminent alien attack. He said he had had an encounter with extraterrestrials in 2014. They had warned him that if humanity did not “start being good people” they would destroy Earth with a “nuclear laser beam”. At first he tried to spread the message of the extraterrestrials, but then decided to construct the explosive device after finding that no one would listen to him. “When he tells people about his alien encounter, people say he is crazy,” said the criminal complaint. Two women who know Oxenreider said that he had converted to Islam a few years ago under the name ‘Muhammad Shahid’, and that he had told them about his plans to make the bomb. *singularfortean.com*, 26 June 2019.

## SIDELINES...

### DINGO SNATCHES BABY

Luke Allister saved his 14-month-old son, Hunter, after a dingo dragged the boy from his bed in a camper van on Fraser Island, Queensland. Hearing cries, Luke rushed outside to find Hunter with his head in a dingo's mouth. Two other dingos lurked nearby. He fought off the wild dogs and the child was flown to hospital with a fractured skull and puncture wounds to his leg and upper body. FT recalls a dingo's fatal seizure of two-month-old Azaria Chamberlain in the Northern Territory in 1980. *Times*, 20 April; (Brisbane) *Courier Mail*, 3 June 2019.

### BAT OUT OF HULL

Two-year-old Kian Mallinson of Hull was bitten at night in his cot by a pipistrelle bat on 11 July. The following morning, his mother Jodie Smith noticed three marks on his arm. When she lifted Kian's duvet, the bat flicked out and crawled across the floor. Kian was given a precautionary rabies jab; the bat died hours after being caught. *D.Mail*, 17+18 July 2019.

### BAD DOGS!

On 14 June, more than a dozen rabbis from the city of Elad near Tel Aviv issued an edict declaring all dogs bad, because they bark at people, and warning residents that keeping them is strictly forbidden. “Anyone raising a dog is accursed and especially in our city where many women and children are afraid of dogs,” stated the edict. Elad has about 46,000 residents most of whom are Haredi Orthodox. *timesofisrael.com*, 12 July 2019.



MARTIN ROSS





## STRANGE DAYS

### SIDELINES...

#### BIBLICAL DISPUTE

On 28 May 2014, Joshua Guy, 32, was being driven home in Brisbane, Australia, by Jehovah's Witness Benjamin Jessop. Holding a knife to Jessop's throat, Guy asked him: "Are you saying that Satan is not going to burn in eternal torment for ever?" Jessop replied: "Yes, that's what the Bible teaches." Guy then slashed Jessop's throat, exposing his jugular vein, a wound that required surgery. Guy has now been jailed for seven years. *(Sydney D.Telegraph, 20 Mar 2019.*

#### IRONIC CONFLAGRATIONS

On 13 February, a fire engine burst into flames inside a Mansfield, Massachusetts, fire station. Two firefighters were treated for smoke inhalation. Then on 6 March, a fire station on Madeline Island, Wisconsin, belonging to the La Pointe Fire Department, burned to the ground. There were no injuries, but the building was a complete loss. *[AP] 14 Feb; CBS Minnesota, 6 Mar 2019.*

#### SPY FARCE

Cesar Gómez, 50, dug a tunnel underneath the house of Griselda Santillán, his former partner of 14 years, to spy on her, in the northern Mexican town of Puerto Penasco. He became trapped in the tunnel and was stuck for 24 hours, calling for help. Santillán discovered him, and rescuers removed him by force. He was then jailed for violating a restraining order. *Irish Independent, 30 April 2019.*

#### BURIED GOLF BALLS

For the past three years, the North family have found golf balls buried in their garden in Felixtowe, Suffolk, first in flowerbeds and this year in the lawn. "I guess it must be squirrels mistaking them for eggs," said Mrs North. "Even more bizarrely, we do not live near a golf course." *D.Mail, 23 July 2019.*

#### QUITE CANNY, REALLY

Fourth division Spanish football team Mostoles Balompie has been renamed Flat Earth FC. "We are born to unite the voices of millions of flat earth movement followers and all those people who are looking for answers," announced club president Javi Poves, who realised the renaming was "the best way to have a constant presence in the media". *marca.com, 1 July 2019.*

### TREE HAS INNER FIRE



ABOVE: Firefighters in Millbury, Massachusetts, arrived at Clearview Country Club to find an unusual blaze – inside a tree.

In the early hours of 26 May, a bolt of lightning struck a tree in the grounds of Clearview Country Club in Millbury, Massachusetts, and set it on fire. When firefighters arrived

they found that the fire had consumed the interior of the tree but had left the exterior intact, resulting in a rather eerie-looking smouldering wooden husk silhouetted

against the early morning sky. After taking a few pictures, the team was able to extinguish the blaze using a fire hose. *unexplained-mysteries.com, 28 May 2019.*



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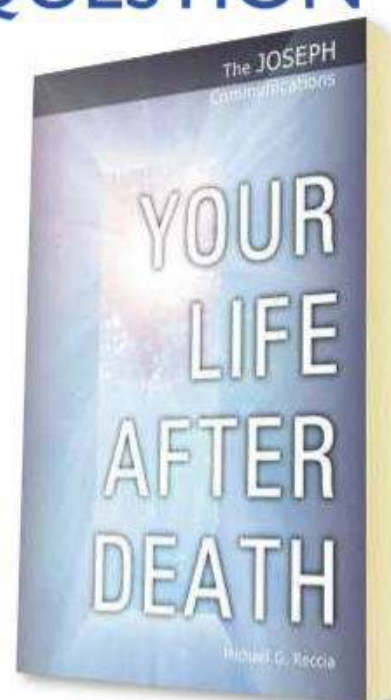
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# Trump versus the weather

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the science of hurricane control... and wonders if the Donald was right

Scientists have explored technology for weather control for decades, and conspiracy theorists frequently discuss the capacity of the US to create or direct seemingly natural catastrophes. Some such musings have apparently reached the ears of the US President. “Why don’t we nuke them?” Trump reportedly asked during a briefing on hurricane preparedness. “They start forming off the coast of Africa, as they’re moving across the Atlantic, we drop a bomb inside the eye of the hurricane and it disrupts it. Why can’t we do that?”

Advisors hastily dissuaded Trump from reaching for the red button, but the idea has been suggested so many times that the US National Ocean and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) website has a page on “Why don’t we try to destroy tropical cyclones by nuking them?” There are, as the NOAA point out, safety issues:

“Apart from the fact that this might not even alter the storm, this approach neglects the problem that the released radioactive fallout would fairly quickly move with the trade winds to affect land areas and cause devastating environmental problems. Needless to say, this is not a good idea.”

The idea has certainly been explored. Back in 1959 Project Plowshare explored peaceful uses for atomic explosives. Jack Reed, a meteorologist at Sandia National Laboratory, calculated that a gigantic 20-megaton nuclear device might disrupt a hurricane, potentially reducing wind speeds from 100 knots to 50. “Even though odds may exist against creating a trigger effect, the test should be made,” Reed concluded.

In 1961, Francis Riechelderfer, head of the US Weather Bureau, told a press conference that he could see “the possibility someday of exploding a nuclear bomb on a hurricane far at sea.” The details needed working out though and he added that they would not make the attempt “until we know what we’re doing.”

The problem is one of scale. Hurricanes are more powerful than nuclear weapons, releasing as much energy as 10 megatons of TNT in 20 minutes. For comparison the warhead on America’s Minuteman intercontinental missiles is a mere 350 kilotons, the warheads on the Trident submarine-launched missile are 100 kilotons. Reed acknowledged that even his megabomb would be a long shot.

A smarter approach would hit the



LEFT: Trump couldn’t prevent Hurricane Dorian from devastating the Bahamas.

the seeding had any effect, but the storm subsequently turned and made landfall in Savannah, Georgia, causing significant damage.

The work was continued in Project Stormfury, in which hurricanes were seeded with silver iodide from 1962-9. As with all cloud seeding projects, the challenge was always to tell whether things had turned out any differently as a result of the seeding. A lack of confirmed results

led to Stormfury eventually being terminated in 1983.

In more recent years meteorologists have improved their understanding of how hurricanes are formed. It is all about heat transfer: hurricanes are powered by warmth from the ocean rising into the air, so interrupting the sunlight reaching the sea might be an easy way to prevent hurricanes forming. A 2012 paper for the Royal Meteorological Society described how hurricanes might be weakened by ‘Marine Cloud Brightening’. This is essentially a matter of seeding clouds, not to produce rain but to create more tiny water droplets and make the clouds more reflective. Less heat reaches the sea, so there is less hurricane fuel.

A similar approach suggested by Harvard physicist Russell Seitz is known as ‘Bright Water’, and has merchant ships pumping bubbles into their wakes to make the sea more reflective and absorb less sunlight. This would have the same end effect as cloud brightening.

Another way to tackle the problem, and one that has had some support from Bill Gates, is with ‘Salter Sinks’. These are forests of floating vertical tubes using wave power to force cooler water to the surface, reducing the chance of a hurricane forming or strengthening.

While hurricane mitigation is a major challenge, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Certainly, given the billions of dollars of damage caused by hurricanes in recent years, and the prospects of things getting worse, research into hurricane defence might not be such a bad idea. However, President Trump denied the claim that he suggested that hurricanes could be nuked, calling it ‘fake news’. Which is a pity as it might have been one of his smarter suggestions.

hurricane before it gains full strength. The American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorentz famously called his 1972 paper “Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?” – pointing out how tiny changes in initial conditions can result in large and unpredictable changes at a later stage. The problem is this unpredictability. The NOAA point out that 80 disturbances a year form in the Atlantic basin, but only five turn into hurricanes, so a lot of nukes would be needed. (A better solution would be more accurate prediction, so the job could be done with conventional explosive – or a squadron of trained butterflies).

The NOAA similarly fields suggestions about blowing up tornadoes with explosive rockets. Tornadoes are tiny compared to hurricanes, and last minutes rather than days. The problem is that when a tornado is dangerous, it is by definition in a populated area where people might be hurt and property damaged, which is exactly the sort of place where you do not want a massive explosion. There is also a lack of research on what the effect would be; disrupting one tornado might simply cause another one to appear a few hundred metres away as the conditions for formation would still be present.

There are less explosive ways to tackle hurricanes. In 1947, the NOAA’s Project Cirrus attempted to slow down a hurricane with cloud seeding (see **FT247:8-9**). It had already been established that dropping dry ice into clouds caused them to release their moisture; the idea was that seeding the eyewall of a hurricane would reduce its power.

The Project Cirrus team dropped 80kg (176lb) of powdered dry ice on to a storm that was heading out to sea in the Gulf of Mexico. It was not possible to tell whether





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**PAUL SIEVEKING** surveys this month's finds: a long-lost Lewis Chessman and an Ice Age wolf's head

## FROZEN WOLF HEAD

The first intact head of an Ice Age wolf found preserved in permafrost for 40,000 years was unveiled at a woolly mammoth exhibition in Tokyo last June. The 15in (38cm) head was found on the Tirekhtyakh river by locals hunting for mammoth tusks in the remote Siberian region of Yakutia in 2018. Well-preserved infant cave lions had previously been found nearby. The wolf was between two and four years old when it died. Researchers at the Museum of Natural History in Stockholm and the Jikei University School of Medicine in Tokyo continue to study the DNA and internal anatomy of the head, which includes a fully preserved brain. The "Pleistocene wolf" may have been beheaded by a prehistoric hunter. It is not clear whether the animal was larger than contemporary wolves, but its jaws were definitely stronger, and were probably capable of bringing down prey as big as bison. *D.Telegraph*, 12 June; *Metro*, 13 June 2019.



ABOVE: The 40,000-year-old wolf's head was found preserved in permafrost in the Siberian region of Yakutia.

## LEWIS CHESSMAN TURNS UP

A mediæval chess piece missing for 188 years had been unknowingly kept in a drawer by an Edinburgh family. They had no idea that the object was one of the long-lost Lewis Chessmen – inspiration for the children's TV cartoon *Noggin the Nog*). The chessmen were found in a sand dune on the Isle of Lewis in 1831, but the whereabouts of five pieces remained a mystery. The Edinburgh family's grandfather, an antiques dealer, had bought the chess piece for £5 from another Edinburgh dealer in 1964. He had no idea of the significance of the 3.5in (88mm) piece, made from walrus ivory in the late 12th/early

13th century. His family looked after it for 55 years without realising its importance, although the current owner's late mother believed it "almost had magical qualities". Taken to Sotheby's auction house in London, it was identified by Alexander Kader. "It's a little bit bashed up," he said. "It has lost its left eye. But that kind of weather-beaten, weary warrior added to its charm."

The Lewis Chessmen comprise some 82 pieces in the British Museum and 11 pieces held by the National Museum of Scotland. As well as the chess pieces, the hoard includes 14 "tablemen" gaming pieces and a buckle. It is thought the objects were made in Norway

and buried shortly after they were made, possibly by a merchant to avoid taxes after being shipwrecked. Since the hoard was uncovered, one knight and four warders have been missing from the four combined chess sets. The newly discovered piece is a warder, a man with helmet, shield and sword and the equivalent of a rook (castle) on a modern chessboard. On 1 July it sold at a Sotheby's auction for £735,000. (Three days later, rival auction house Christie's sold a quartzite bust of Tutankhamun for £4.7 million.) *BBC News*, 3 June, 2 July; *D.Telegraph*, 4 June, 5 July 2019.

## CHANGE TO SAXON

Iron Age roundhouses, Roman burials and Saxon pottery have been discovered in a hitherto unknown settlement in Warboys, Cambridgeshire, during a seven-month dig. "What makes this site really significant is we have evidence of early Saxon occupation mingled with the latest Roman remains," said archaeologist Stephen Macaulay. "We almost never find actual physical evidence of this." The settlement reverted to agricultural use after the seventh century.

The earliest finds include eight roundhouses, some of which date back to about 100 BC, three crouched human burials and pottery from 500 BC. The 10-acre (4ha) site provided evidence of Roman rural industry, including a 15ft (4.6m) corn dryer and kilns. Archaeologists "seem to have stumbled upon a shrine" and discovered cattle skulls and a largely intact horse skeleton, which they believe could be votive offerings. Saxon pottery, beads, worked antler and metalworking residues were also uncovered. *BBC News*, 23 July 2019.



ABOVE: This newly discovered Lewis Chessman was missing for 188 years; it was sold at Sotheby's on 1 July.





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 241: WISER BUT SADDER

“*Via Ovicipitum dura est*” (The Way of the Egghead is Hard) – Adlai Stevenson

Heraclitus had two off-putting nicknames: ‘The Weeping Philosopher’ and ‘The Obscure’. The first is offset by the Atomist Democritus, ‘The Laughing Philosopher’, the second was self-inflicted by his deliberately writing his book *On Nature* as arcanelly as possible – precursor of James Joyce.

Still, Mike Jay [FT145:56], reviewing Richard Geldard’s *Remembering Heraclitus: The Philosopher of Riddles* (2001), dubs him the first fortean philosopher, finding much in common with both their ideas and writing styles.

Heraclitus gets this haiku from the previously recommended Haris Vlavianos:  
So it wasn’t you.  
Who entered the river twice.  
It was someone else.

This alludes to one of his three most famous sayings: You Cannot Step Into The Same River Twice, later refined by his pupil Cratylus into You Cannot Step Into The Same River Once. Heraclitus was here distilling his theory that everything in the Universe is in a state of perpetual flux, therefore the river you see has changed by the time you step into it.

As he put it, *Panta Rhei Kai Ouden Menei* (Everything Is In A State Of Flux And Nothing Stays the Same), which would make a good graffito in any public lavatory – indeed I’ve seen claims that it does appear in a – where else? – Oxford jakes, this latter term for ‘bog’ being 17th-century undergraduate slang there, according to Francis Grose’s *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (ed. Eric Partridge, 1796).

His third zinger was “Much Learning Does Not Make A Man Wise,” an assertion constantly proven true in our own world, as evidenced by the torrents of rubbish spewed out by academics. It’s probably significant that Diogenes starts with more detail than his life with Heraclitus’s death. In his later years, he anticipated Timon of Athens in misanthropy, living in the mountains on grass and herbs. When this brought on the dropsy, he returned to the city to seek medical aid. But his habitual obscurity of expression confounded them so he was left to his own devices, which consisted of, first, burying himself in a



cowshed, expecting cure from its damp, then, this failing, moved into the sun, smearing himself with cow-dung. Unable to scratch this off, he lay unrecognisable until eaten alive by dogs.

Xenophanes is haiku-ed thus:

If a skinhead were  
To depict God he would put  
A ring in his nose.

This alludes to his pioneering (Plato would more notoriously follow suit) ridicule of Greek anthropomorphic religion, along with castigation of its chief propagators Homer and Hesiod, again inspiring Plato, between them constructing the slippery slope to literary censorship.

Xenophanes giped that Thracian (= Bulgarian) gods are red-haired and snub-nosed because Thracians themselves were. Also that cows, if they could think, would invent and worship bovine-looking divinities. Xenophanes achieved nonagenarian status, a rarity in antiquity, qualifying for a mention in a list of long-livers attributed to Lucian [FT134:23]. Over it, Xenophanes encountered many vicissitudes. He was born at Colophon (Turkey), a city notorious for its indulgence in golden bling and round-the-clock boozing. For some reason he was exiled and took up residence in Sicilian Elea, both of which he celebrated in lengthy verse encomia. All his writings were in verse, of which he had no mean opinion: “My fame will reach all Greece and will never die as long as the Greek kind of song survives” – what size of hat did he wear? At one stage, he was sold into slavery (so also Plato), being ransomed by some very forgiving Pythagoreans whose leader he had famously slagged off.

Worst, he suffered the agony (as did fellow-philosopher Anaxagoras) of having to bury his own pre-deceased children.

Two further fragments of his poetry make us yearn for more. One consists of light-hearted tips for organising a symposium, a word originally meaning a drink party, nowadays downgraded to denote any gathering of so-called experts. Editors Kirk & Raven take this to mean “He was honourably received in great houses”. But it seems unlikely that such a notorious maverick would be, hence I take it to be satirical, as were the future chain of comic symposia in both prose (Lucian and Petronius) and verse

(Horace and Juvenal).

The other fragment ridicules the excessive adulation and rewards heaped on athletes, saying sporting fame does not enhance a city, merely makes the sportsman boastful – plenty of modern targets for him here. This is the earliest recorded example of such aspersions. A later one comes from Euripides, *Autolycus*, fr.282. Both poets were controversial figures, their unpopularity probably here enhanced, such attitudes not going down well with those fans who lapped up the laudatory Odes of Pindar, the first-known sports reporter.

Plato, by the way, was an Olympic wrestler before turning to philosophy. Early Stoic guru Clenches had been a boxer, likewise Diocese, a participant in Macrobius’s dialogue *Saturnalia* (fourth or fifth-century AD). I suppose such transitions to wrestling with ideas is logical enough.

Religious mockeries apart, Xenophanes is almost important as a harbinger of Darwin’s interpretations of fossils. He observed fossilised fish and seaweed in Syracuse stone quarries, a bayleaf impressed in marble, and “all kinds of marine life” on Malta, drawing the appropriate conclusions regarding the connection between seawater and human life.

I have read recently that some scientists are now sceptical about the importance of old fossils. Being one myself, I trust they are wrong.

“Eggheads of the world, unite; you have nothing to lose but your yolks” – Stevenson again.





# Faceless phantoms

ALAN MURDIE asks whether the motif of the faceless ghost might be neurophysiological in origin

There is a remarkable economy of motifs in ghost lore, with the same limited range of spectral types turning up time and time again. Undoubtedly, one of the most shuddersome is the notorious ‘faceless phantom’. I was reminded of this category by the letter published in *Fortean Times* from this magazine’s valued correspondent Nils Erik Grande of Norway. Raising some interesting questions concerning the clothes worn by entities, he cited the belief in Swedish folklore that “the Little People are somehow ‘hollow’: if you can get behind them, you can see that they are only facades” and that the forms so represented are incomplete [FT382:73].

Such thoughts may irresistibly remind the well informed British ghost hunter of the curious Cardiff poltergeist which performed at a repair workshop in the city in 1989 [FT381:20]. Seen in apparitional guise only once, it appeared to be little more than a set of clothes – a boy’s school uniform – reflecting the tendency of certain ghosts to be only partly formed or realised, almost being simply a gestalt image generated from... well, who knows? (*Journal of SPR*, vol.58, no.827, 1991-92). It is the question of these incomplete or partly constructed phantoms that is pertinent to the enduring phenomenon of the faceless ghost.

Nearly 20 years ago, I pointed out the marked lack of reliable headless ghost sightings [FT141:46, Dec 2000]. First-hand accounts of headless phantoms are noticeably absent among contemporary reports, although tradition and popular culture are filled with marvellous tales of decapitated spectres. Compensating for this paucity of headless shades, however, are those phantoms that appear fully made-up with their heads (or at least hats or headgear) but lacking proper facial features. Their faces are blanks, gleaming ovals or otherwise distorted, reminiscent of the ghastly visage of the pilot imagined in JG Ballard’s *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970): “The planes of his face failed to intersect, as if their true resolution took place in some as yet invisible dimension, or required elements other than those provided by his own character and musculature”.

Reported generation after generation, as with many unexplained fortean categories, accounts prove widespread. In the same way that in the UK one is supposedly never very far away from a living and material



ABOVE: The ruined church at Covehithe, home to a faceless White Lady seen as recently as the 1970s.

## “Where the face should have been there was nothing but darkness”

rat, the prevalence of these disfigured apparitions in folklore and actual sightings indicates that at any one time we may be in much closer proximity to a faceless phantom than we might wish...

To illustrate the distribution by following the cardinal compass points, one of the most easterly ghosts in England is the faceless White Lady of Covehithe, near Lowestoft, haunting the atmospheric ruined church now threatened by the eroding cliffs. I first found her mentioned in WA Dutt’s *Highways and Byways of East Anglia* (1903) and 70 years later in *Haunted Lowestoft* (1975) by Ivan Bunn and MW Burgess, reporting sightings from just the year before.

Going northwards, a faceless man is reputed to haunt South Bridge Vaults, Edinburgh, a site also greatly troubled by poltergeist-like incidents, the number of which, if accurately reported, would make it one of the most haunted places in the UK. (*Scotsman*, 19 Feb 2018).

From the south of England comes the chilling description of a male figure seen by a man driving along a country road to Ditchling Beacon, the highest point on the Sussex downs where:

“...the hat, the coat, and even a scarf knotted at the throat were plain to see in the bright red brake lights, but where the face should have been was nothing but darkness. It wasn’t in shadow from the hat, as the brakes were low down and lit the figure completely. It wasn’t a balaclava or any other face covering, as that would at least have shown an outline. Above the scarf and below the hat, there was simply nothing at all.” (See ‘Ghost Cat and the faceless man: nine stories for Hallowe’en’, *Guardian*, 31 Oct 2016).

To the west, Cardiff Castle appears to have a pair, one described as “a faceless vision in a flowing greyish-white skirt” appearing in a stockroom and the other “the ghost of a faceless woman in a long skirt called Sarah seen at the Castle”, though they could be one and the same figure. Source: [www.castlesandmanorhouses.com/ghosts.php?SelectCountry=Wales](http://www.castlesandmanorhouses.com/ghosts.php?SelectCountry=Wales)

Cardiff was also the location of the faceless figure seen in the poltergeist outbreak referenced above. From *The*



*Responsive South Wales Poltergeist: A Follow-Up Report*, a file compiled by the late Professor David Fontana:

*"On opening the workshop door at the start of the working day, Paul [the witness] saw the apparition of a small boy aged about 12 years sitting on one of the shelves near the ceiling in what in my first report I referred to as the 'active' corner. The room was illuminated only by the natural light thrown through the workshop door, but Paul registered that the boy was wearing short trousers and a peaked school cap. Apart from an oval shape there was, however, no face under the cap, and no outline of hands or bare knees."*

Paul called out "Hello!" and "What are you doing here?", whereupon a float was thrown towards him from the 'active' corner, and the apparition vanished.

For once, despite the strangeness of this sight, the witness reported no sense of fear, saying: "In fact it was quite a pleasant experience, as if seeing a real child". Or rather, was it emblematic of the childish nature of the manifestations, represented by the distinct appearance of clothing alone?

Other witnesses are more likely to scream their heads off. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a house near St Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Birmingham was badly haunted. The occupiers suffered uncanny sounds, including sobs, sighs and what sounded like a desperate struggle going on. The tenant's wife was "almost terrified out of her senses" upon seeing a tall stout man and a large grey dog at his side appearing before the fireplace. Acutely alarming was the face of the man being "a mere blob of flesh devoid of any features". As she screamed, there came a loud crashing sound. Summoned by her screams, a friend ran into the room, arriving in time to see two clouds of vapour hovering over the hearth before dispersing. A gas fitter working at the house also encountered the figures, providing a detailed description of the male apparition, confirming that "he had no eyes, nor nose, nor mouth, only ears and long hair". As to the reason for the hauntings, local rumour avowed the house

had been occupied in 1829 by a man who supplied medical students with human bodies. At the time it had been noticed how some people seen to enter the house in the company of the owner were never seen to leave it again. The story is carried in Elliot O'Donnell's *Ghost Hunters* (1971) edited by Harry Ludlam, a volume slightly more reliable than most of his output, with the original source cited as a book of memoirs by a former Chief Constable of Warwickshire (though I have yet to trace this).

Some well-attested reports were obtained by the SPR, gathered in its first few decades of collecting testimonies of apparitions and hallucinations. Facelessness was not a detail inserted to relieve the tedium of the numerous and solemn reports catalogued (most accounts are likely to induce sleep when read late at night rather than deprive one of rest). Often it is testified that the faces of ghosts are not seen, or appear vague or concealed (the classic being the famous

Cheltenham Ghost which appeared holding a handkerchief or cloth to its face – see *The Cheltenham Ghost* (1948) by B Abdy Collins). Cambridge classicist Mrs Margaret Verrall – who later developed the mediumistic ability of automatic writing – supplies a rare example of a witness unperturbed by visits from such a spectre. It appeared before her as an old lady with a cap and shawl in separate houses in Brighton and Cambridge. "The only odd thing about it was that I never saw the face – there seemed a blank within the cap." (In *Proceedings of SPR* (1894) vol.10).

An account collected in 1896 from a Mrs Dauntsey involved a lady in black walking through her home at Ryecroft Hall, Manchester. Mrs Dauntsey wrote: "*The ghost... is the figure of a woman, sometimes black, and sometimes white. Only the back is generally seen – the face has never been seen. The figure has been seen in nearly all the rooms at different times.*"

One morning Mrs Dauntsey was kneeling in a doorway attending to decorations for a party when she "*looked up and saw the figure – in black – which appeared to have walked over me, through the doorway. It went through a door on the left into the hall.*" Worse still, the apparition seemed to be a harbinger for deaths in the family.

I have many more cases noted in my files, for instance the apparition of a man whose face was a "featureless grey blank" and where the eyes should have been were "sunken dark shadows" seen at St Michael's Church Highworth, Wiltshire, over a 60-year period 1910-1970 (Andrew Green, in *Our Haunted Kingdom*, 1973); the 14 year-old female witness who saw a figure whose "features were lost in a whitish grey appearance as if he was made of wax. She could not see his eyes, or any other details of his face except for his nose" at Crawley Railway Station (Nick Brazil, in *A Journey with Ghosts*, 1990); the phantom lady with a mist where her



LEFT: The Cheltenham Ghost, its face concealed by a cloth or handkerchief.





# GHOSTWATCH

face should have been manifesting at Greenfield Lodge, Barkisland (*Yorkshire Post*, 28 Mar 1983); the faceless old man haunting Cameley Green, Twerton, Bath (Ian Girvan and Margaret Royal, in *Local Ghosts*, 1975). The phantom policeman with a face “so dreadfully mutilated that people gasp in horrified sympathy” appearing at Bracknell, Berkshire, may well be one of the same class, there being no record of any death or injury to a police officer in the area to account for it (Anthony Hippisley Coxe, *Haunted Britain*, 1973; John Harries, *The Ghost Hunter’s Road Book*, 1968).

Reports of such apparitions continue to accumulate online, for example one from a gentleman who described his disturbing sighting in summer 1999 at Long Stanton in Cambridge of a figure “which didn’t seem to have any facial features” that jumped out in front of his car on the unlit road between Long Stanton and Bar Hill. (Source: [www.yourghoststories.com/real-ghost-story.php?story=23916](http://www.yourghoststories.com/real-ghost-story.php?story=23916)).

In my opinion, reports of facial blanks and distorted or missing features with apparitions, spread over generations, and so widely distributed, indicate that a genuine experiential phenomenon is involved.

A symbolic and psychological meaning to these spectres was advanced by Aniela Jaffé, the last secretary of Carl Jung and his former patient, in her book *Apparitions* (1963). In her view, facelessness was a symbol or signal of the potential inner development of the personality of the witness, in either a positive or negative direction, but her ideas are far from clear. Her interest is likely to have been inspired by an experience of Jung himself in England. Formerly a disbeliever in ghosts, ascribing them to projections from the unconscious, he changed his opinion after staying at a farmhouse in Buckinghamshire. Lying in bed, he was alarmed to find next to him on his pillow the head of an old woman with her eye open and glaring at him. The left half of the face was missing below the eye. Jung leapt out of bed, lit a candle and spent the rest of the night in an armchair, now rather more convinced of the external and objective nature of hauntings than he had been hitherto.

This detail of half the face missing matches the alarming and widely reported experience of Roger Froggatt, landlord of the Low Valley Arms, Barnsley, in April 2006. He called out the police having been left severely shocked after seeing at his pub the ghostly figure of a woman dressed all in white. She lacked half her face, from her cheekbone down to her jaw. (*Yorkshire Post*, 25 April 2006). Of course, Roger Froggatt may have been a student



ABOVE: An old postcard showing Ryecroft Hall, where Mrs Dauntsey saw a faceless ghost in 1896.

of the works of Jung, but somehow I think this unlikely; if so, he did not mention any interest in Jungian psychology in interviews with the press.

Alternatively, the ubiquity of these experiences might suggest some kind of underlying neurophysiological causation at work.

I have long suspected that conditions such as Charles Bonnett syndrome [see **FT184:46-49, 125:14, 321:54-55**] may account for some spectral sightings of diminutive figures, and I wonder if the element of facelessness indicates the involvement of particular portions of the brain related to a rare clinical condition – a real mouthful – ‘Prosopometamorphopsia’.

This rare condition was first described in 1947 by Joachim Bodamer, based upon a study of the visual distortion of faces suffered by a 24-year old patient who had been shot in the head. The condition is distinguished from ‘prosopagnosia’, which is characterised by the inability to recognise faces, and may be attributable to structural brain changes or functional disorders such as epilepsy, migraine, or physical eye disease (see ‘When every face is like another’ by David Dobbs *Scientific American*, 19 Nov 2007).

Hitherto, many studies of hallucinations by psychical researchers and neurophysiologists have tended to be one-sided and even partisan, neither referencing the literature of the other. Neurophysiologists can be overly keen to diagnose a variety of conditions to explain entity encounters, with models derived from very limited samples of patients or very slight evidence (and sometimes with no evidence at all, for example the labelling by Peter Brugger of Swedish poet August Strindberg (1849-1912) as a sufferer of a neurological complaint to

explain his breakdown and peculiar visions – see Peter Brugger (2001) ‘From haunted brain to haunted science: A cognitive neuroscience view of paranormal and pseudoscientific thought’ in *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (eds. J Houran & R Lange) pp.195-213.

Equally, ghost hunters and psychical researchers have been similarly parochial in outlook, and not really addressed the possible causes of characteristics like the distorted or blank faces displayed by some phantoms with reference to the clinical literature, though many were writing before modern advances in neuroscience and the development of sophisticated brain scanning and mapping techniques.

A useful dialogue could be promoted between the two perspectives. In my view, the neurophysiological angle is well worth pursuing in seeking an explanation for faceless phantoms, but with the caveat that accounts from witnesses who encounter these disturbing apparitions should not be relegated merely to the realm of illusion, pathology or childish tales. Any possible theoretical explanation must also address collective aspects of these hauntings and, as with the Cardiff poltergeist, the physical phenomena such as object movements. Witnesses who encounter these disturbing appearances should be treated with sensitivity and understanding. Judging by the scared or horrified reactions of many, these are not experiences in any way looked for, desired or welcomed, whatever may be taking place. Groucho Marx may have quipped, “I never forget a face but in your case I’ll be glad to make an exception”, but in many cases witnesses never wanted to see these faceless apparitions at all.



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## MEDICAL BAG

Rare dental anomalies in Russia and India, extreme metal-munching in Bengal, and a grisly haul of body parts from an Arizona research centre



SAVEETHA MEDICAL COLLEGE / CATERS NEWS

### DENTAL ANOMALIES

- An unnamed 13-year-old boy underwent surgery at the Morozov Children's Hospital in Moscow after a tooth was found growing inside one of his testicles. There was a gap in his jaw where the tooth should have grown. Medics had initially feared the lump was a tumour, but were stunned when a scan revealed the tooth. They said: "The tooth was the second molar, or the seventh in the upper jaw. It is usually replaced by the permanent tooth at the age of 10 to 12. Dental science knows examples when teeth grew inside the lung; but a tooth growing inside a testicle is a truly unique case." The operation was a success. *Metro online*, 10 June 2019.

- Ravindran, a seven-year-old Indian boy who had suffered occasional toothache, was found to have 526 teeth inside his jaw. They were found in a 5in (13cm) sack nestled in the molar region of his lower right jaw during two hours of surgery carried out at the Saveetha Dental College and Hospital in Chennai. The teeth ranged in size from 0.1mm to 3mm. They had a small crown, enamel and a small root. "We had to drill down into the top [of the lower jaw], make a window and remove the sac," said Pratibha Ramani, head of the department of oral and



maxillofacial pathology. "As [the sac] was going deeper into the tissue, the size of the teeth was becoming very small." Ravindran, who now has 21 teeth, was discharged after three days and is doing

well. Such a dental anomaly is very rare, although doctors in Mumbai extracted 232 teeth from the mouth of a 17-year-old boy in 2014 during a seven-hour operation. *Sun*, 2 Aug; *Guardian*, 3 Aug 2019.

ABOVE: Ravindran and the 526 tiny teeth found in his lower jaw. LEFT: The hoard of jewellery and coins removed from Runi Khatun's stomach.

### METAL MUNCHER

Doctors have removed jewellery and coins worth more than £53,000 from the stomach of an Indian woman. Runi Khatun, 26, was rushed to hospital on 16 July in West Bengal when she began vomiting after every meal. During surgery, 69 chains, 80 earrings, 46 coins, eight lockets, 11 nose rings, four keys, five anklets and one watch dial were removed from her abdomen. The hoard weighed 3.5lb (1.6kg). Runi's mother said she noticed ornaments disappearing from their home, but had no idea that her daughter was swallowing them. She said her daughter got the coins from her brother's shop and added that when she questioned her about the missing objects she would cry.

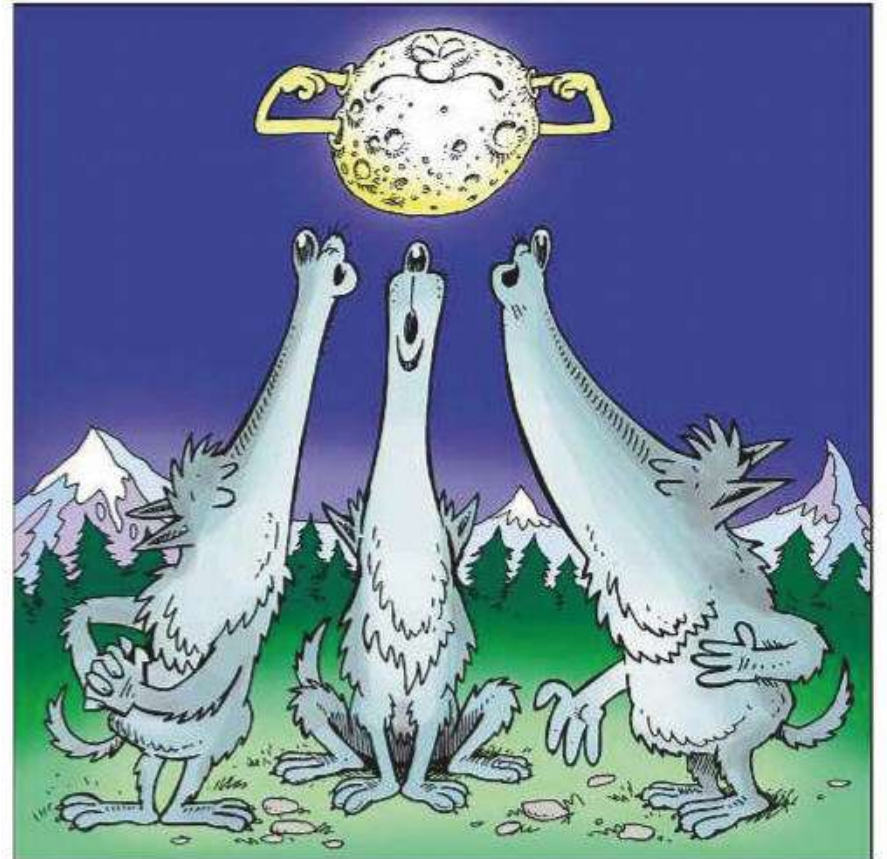
Dr Siddhartha Biswas, head of the surgery department at the Rampurhat Government Medical College and Hospital, said Runi was emaciated. "Her albumin and haemoglobin count were so low that we could not perform an operation at once," he said. "Her condition was so critical that she required at least five bottles of blood. She could not even intake food physically so we had to inject



# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 241: VOICE OF THE WOLF



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

Wolves howl at the Moon.

### The “truth”

Humans have spent a great deal of time studying wolf sounds, and amongst the clearest conclusions of all these researches is that there are no correlations at all between wolf vocalisation and the Moon. Wolves do not react, musically, to the Moon’s rising, setting, phasing, or visibility. Lupine courting takes place in winter, and with it a peak in the singing, so perhaps that explains the widespread association between wolf howls and Moons which are dramatically visible in clear, cold skies. The familiar “howling at the Moon” pose is easily explained by its acoustical advantages; in the right conditions, a well-projected howl will carry for miles. Several reasons for howling have been identified by wolf biologists, including socialisation, sharing news, staking territory, attracting mates, and reporting location. Wolves also howl on waking, in a manner compared to a human stretching and yawning. In choral howling, small groups of wolves can manipulate their sound effects so as to exaggerate, to any listening rivals, the size of their pack.

### Sources

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### Update

In **FT367:25** we wondered about the seemingly perennial belief that “20 years ago” olive oil, for culinary rather than medical purposes, was unknown in Britain. The Spring 2019 issue of *The Vegetarian* magazine reprints a selection of adverts from 100 years earlier, including one which offers a solution to that winter’s “butter famine” – emulsified olive oil. The advertiser insists that it is “not merely a splendid substitute for butter – it is superior,” being “delicious, easily digestible and [it] doubles the energy of the user.” It’s also “now recognised as the best remedy... for Bronchitis, Nervous Disorders and Sleeplessness.”



food through her mouth.” Runi was slowly stabilised and within a week she went under the knife. “If we had operated on her earlier, she wouldn’t have survived,” said Dr Biswas.

In India, there had been a marked rise in reports of people swallowing solid objects. On 14 July, doctors in the Chhattarpur district of Madhya Pradesh removed 30 objects from the stomach of Yogesh Thakur, 30, including razor blades and screwdrivers, after he complained of having severe abdominal pain. Last May, a man in Rajasthan swallowed 116 nails and had to undergo an operation. And last year, surgeons removed around three pounds of metal, including nuts, bolts and jewellery from a woman’s stomach in Gujarat. The weird and rare disorder where people eat sharp metal objects is known as acuphagia. It is a category of pica, a psychological disorder characterised by an appetite for substances that are largely non-nutritive, such as soil, ice, hair, paper, drywall or paint, sharp objects, metal, stones, glass, faeces and chalk. *dailymail.co.uk*, 25 July 2019.

### BODY SHOP

Bodies donated to the Biological Resource Center in Phoenix, Arizona, for medical research

by relatives were treated in a cavalier fashion. The company – a body donation and tissue bank facility – gave donors and their families free transportation services to pick up the body, plus free cremation. Following an FBI raid, special agent Mark Cwynar saw many body parts piled on top of one another with no identification tags. Some bodies had been dismembered with chainsaws. There was a fridge filled with penises and a bucket of limbs, some



sewn together. Cwynar described the grisly sight of a small woman’s head sewn onto a large male torso “like Frankenstein” and hung up on a wall. Pools of blood and bodily fluids were found on the floor of the freezer. In all, the 1,755 body parts weighed more than 10 tons. The story came to light last July after 33 people whose relatives were donated to the firm began a civil action, which is due to go to court in October. A year after the facility was raided in January 2014, the owner, appropriately called Stephen Gore, was convicted of operating an illegal business and was found to have been selling body parts. Prices ranged from £2,300 for a torso to £300 for a knee. *azcentral.com*, 19 July; *Irish Independent*, 27 July 2019.



ABOVE: The FBI remove bags of body parts from the Biological Resource Center in Phoenix, Arizona. TOP: The facility’s owner, the appropriately named Stephen Gore.





## KARL SHUKER goes in search of a cryptid cat and hears electrifying news from the Amazon

### DIGGING UP A BURROWING CAT

On more than one occasion here in my Alien Zoo column, I have mentioned, and marvelled at, the extraordinary 'wild talent' of fellow cryptozoological researcher and friend Richard Muirhead for unearthing fascinating yet hitherto entirely obscure and long-forgotten newspaper reports of cryptozoological interest. Recently he brought yet another such example to my attention. Published in January 1925, it concerns what was referred to as a burrowing cat, but what it truly was could well be another matter entirely. Here is the report:

*A "Burrowing" Cat.*

*Captain Buchanan was engaged on scientific work, for Lord Rothschild and the British Museum, and brought back some remarkable relics of his journey through the heart of the Sahara. His collection was the first brought from there. One of the most valuable specimens was the skin of a "burrowing cat," the only specimen in any collection in the world. This animal greatly resembles a cat, but is able to burrow like a rabbit. It is beautifully marked, has a fine coat, and lynx-like ears. Captain Buchanan started from Lagos, Nigeria, travelled up country about 700 miles [1,130km] to Cano, and then struck across the vast desert to Algiers.*

Captain Buchanan was Captain Angus Buchanan, the famous British explorer who (with his cameraman) was the first white explorer to cross the Sahara by camel. The specific naming of Buchanan, his zoologist sponsor Lord Walter Rothschild, and the British Museum suggests that the report is indeed genuine and not journalistic hokum. So what could this odd-sounding creature be? I immediately thought of the sand cat *Felis margarita*, a small species that does indeed inhabit the Sahara and is the world's only known felid adapted for desert life. Some (though not all) specimens are handsomely marked with stripes and spots, and its ears are very pointed and therefore somewhat reminiscent of a lynx's. Moreover, it does indeed retreat into burrows when the prevailing temperature is too extreme. However, the sand cat's existence was known to science long before 1925 (it was formally named in 1858), with many specimens already preserved in



**LEFT:** A sand cat, the world's only felid adapted for desert life. **BELOW:** A new species of electric eel, the aptly named *Electrophorus voltai*.

museums worldwide, so if it were a sand cat, the report's claim that Buchanan's was the first specimen in any collection is very mystifying. Consequently, if any *FT* reader can dig up any further data, we'd love to hear from you! *Leeds Mercury*, 26 Jan 1925.

### SHOCKING AMAZONIAN NEWS

Ever since it was named by Carl Linnæus himself way back in 1766, the South American electric eel *Electrophorus electricus* has always been deemed to constitute a single species with a very widespread distribution, occurring throughout Greater Amazonia, including parts of Brazil, Suriname and Guyana. Recently, however, a detailed comparative study conducted by a São Paulo Research Foundation team led by zoologist Dr C David de Santana, working with the Smithsonian National Museum

of Natural History, examined 107 specimens obtained from different localities across this expansive distribution range, and yielded some startling results. For although few morphological discrepancies were discovered between these specimens, when their DNA and famous electric shock-producing capabilities were examined a radically different story emerged – one that significantly challenged conventional scientific wisdom regarding this very large and greatly feared freshwater fish.

Their study revealed that in terms of their genetic profiles, the 107 specimens could be divided into three distinct groups, which also correlated with their respective geographical localities

(namely the Guiana Shield region, the Brazilian Shield region, and the lowland Amazon basin). This strongly indicated that there were three wholly discrete species of electric eel. Moreover, one of the two hitherto unrecognised, cryptic species was capable of generating a jolt of up to 860 volts, notably greater than the 650 volts previously recorded from electric eels. In a *Nature Communications* paper published on 10 September, this truly shocking new species has now been formally (and aptly) named *Electrophorus voltai*, and the second new species has been named *E. varii*. <https://news.yahoo.com/shocking-high-voltage-electric-eels-revealed-151604232.html>; [www.independent.co.uk/news/science/electric-eel-species-found-amazon-most-powerful-ever-voltage-kill-a9100581.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/electric-eel-species-found-amazon-most-powerful-ever-voltage-kill-a9100581.html).







# IS NESSIE A GIANT EEL? | New analysis yields an abundance of eels and unidentified DNA; plus China's river monster...



ABOVE: Professor Neil Gemmell poses with a beaker of water from Loch Ness BELOW: The mystery creature filmed in the Yangtze River.

Over the past year, Prof Neil Gemmell, a geneticist from New Zealand's University of Otago, and his colleagues have combed Loch Ness for traces of skin, scales, feathers, fur, faeces and urine – from fish, mammals, or ancient cryptids – that contain DNA. They analysed about 500 million sequences from 250 water samples from different depths all over the loch, and found no evidence of a plesiosaur, circus elephants, or large fish such as sturgeon, catfish, or Greenland shark, all put forward over the last 86 years to account for reports of a monster. (The Gang of Fort reiterates the customary caution that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.)

By contrast, European eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) were much in evidence. Juvenile eels, known as elvers, arrive in Scottish rivers and lochs after migrating more than 3,000 miles (4,800km) from the Sargasso Sea near the Bahamas, where they spawn and lay eggs. They have been known to leap out of the water to feed on terrestrial invertebrates. "There is a very significant amount of eel DNA," said Prof Gemmell. "Eels are very plentiful in Loch Ness, with eel DNA found at pretty much



every location sampled – there are a lot of them. Our data doesn't reveal their size, but the sheer quantity of the material says that we can't discount the possibility that there may be giant eels in Loch Ness. Therefore we can't discount the possibility that what people see and believe is the Loch Ness Monster might be a giant eel... Divers have claimed that they've seen eels that are as thick as their legs in the loch – whether they are exaggerating or not I don't know."

The largest specimen ever caught was nearly 5ft (1.5m) long, and Dr Gemmell said it was possible that a few might have grown "even larger" deep in the loch. (FT correspondent

Alan Gardiner points out that New Zealand has two species of freshwater eel up to 10 times the size of European eels, which might have coloured the opinion of an academic from that country.) Loch Ness also provided DNA from humans, dogs, sheep, cattle, deer, badgers, rabbits, voles, birds, pike and salmon. Crucially, 20 per cent of the DNA came back as "unidentified", leaving open the possibility of an unknown creature in the waters.

Gary Campbell, keeper of a register of Nessie sightings, receives on average 10 reports a year of something unexplained being spotted in the murky waters. Steve Feltham, famous for the longest continuous monster hunting vigil of Loch Ness (28 years), said that it was common knowledge the loch was full of eels and that Prof Gemmell's research had not ruled out other animals such as seals being mistaken for the monster. Loch Ness expert Adrian Shine said the new study had provided researchers with a new list of species to compare against records going back 40 years.

Actually, the eel hypothesis is nothing new. In 1933, the year of the first sighting that

captured the world's attention, a *Daily Mirror* headline read: "The Monster of Loch Ness – Official! Orders That Nobody is to Attack It ... A Huge Eel?" *Dundee Courier & Advertiser*, 22 Aug, 6 Sept; *BBC News*, *popularmechanics.com*, 5 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Express*, *D.Mail*, 6 Sept 2019.

- On 13 September footage appeared on China's popular Sina Weibo microblog of what appeared to be a long, black creature – possibly a giant eel or snake – slithering along the surface of the Yangtze River. Locals were filmed watching the creature from the shore, near the city of Yichang in western Hubei province, close to the Three Gorges Dam. Within three days the video racked up more than six million views.

Professor Wang Chunfang from the Huazhong Agricultural University said it was probably a simple "water snake"; some viewers suggested that "external factors such as pollution" could have a role to play in a sea snake growing to an extraordinary size. However, separate footage led some to question whether the unidentified object was actually a living creature at all. A picture subsequently went viral showing a long piece of black cloth washed up on some rocks, fuelling discussion this might have been the mysterious object. Then on 17 September, a group of workers retrieved a 20m-long industrial airbag, probably discarded from a shipyard; some declared this was the supposed 'monster'. All this led to jokes about whether the local government was trying to attract tourism to the area, given the millions of dollars involved in building and maintaining the Three Gorges Dam. Others made jokes about the quality of the footage, despite the rapid development in China of high quality smartphones, while another said: "Monsters always appear only when there are few pixels". *BBC News*, 17 Sept; *msn.com*, 20 Sept 2019.



## STRANGE CONTINENT

Unfazed by Brexit, **ULRICH MAGIN** scours the papers for the weirdest news stories from across Europe...

### BOHEMIAN BIG CAT

While Germany and Italy had no new reports to add to the puma files, an ABC was seen in southern Bohemia. Since April 2019, several sightings have been made, but only later reported, of a large cat in the region of Jindřichuv Hradec/Neuhaus in the Czech Republic. Police advised people to avoid hiking in the area's forests and assumed – what else? – that the big cat had escaped from a private collection. Google news lists two-and-a-half pages of puma stories in Czech from February to July 2019, several accompanied by photos of caged pumas. *Radio Praha*, 15 June 2019.

### CROP CIRCLES

As a kind of prelude to the season, the first ever “exploding crop circle” was reported from Germany. On the night of 22-23 June, after a loud bang was heard, police discovered a crater in a field near Limburg-Ahlbach, Hesse, Germany. It had been caused by a World War II bomb with a time lapse trigger. It is not uncommon for such bombs to explode, even after decades, explained Frank Bender of the Bomb Disposal Service. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 25 June 2019.

Crop circles proper were soon being seen across Europe, with the majority in France. In June, one was found in a wheat field at Moisselles in the Département Val-d'Oise. Following this 13 additional crop circles appeared all over France, from the Channel to Alsace, and from the south of the country to the area around Paris. The last one appeared on 16 July 2019 in a wheat field near Auchy-les-Mines in Département Pas-de-Calais.

Russia had its first circle of the year on 19 June, in wheat near Fastovetskaya, near the eastern banks of Black Sea, and another on 23



BORIS ROESSLER / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

**ABOVE:** Germany's first exploding crop circle: an aerial view shows a crater in a barley field near Ahlbach, on 24 June 2019.

June at Sokolovskoe. Poland had a pictogram at Wolka Orchowska, near the “UFO hot spot” of Wylatowo, which formed a yin/yang symbol, and the Czech Republic followed on 5 July with a badly drawn specimen between Brezina and Osek. *www.grenzwissenschaft-aktuell.de/kornkreise-2019-neue-formationen-bis-mitte-juli20190719/*.

Switzerland had several circles, the first being discovered by farmer Daniel Schluep on 24 June in a field by the river Aare near Büren. While some thought it had been formed by the wind, it is quite clearly a pictogram with a central circle, and a semi-circular path leading to a satellite (*Solothurner Zeitung*, 27 June 2019). On 4 July, farmer Hans-Rudolf Wyder found a six-point star inscribed within a circle in his field at Büren, also near the Aare. *Tages-Anzeiger*, 7 July 2019; *Berner Zeitung*, 6 July 2019; *BauernZeitung*, 4 July 2019.

### PUZZLING POSTERS

A new meme seems to be spreading across Europe: posters concerning dangerous animal escapees. Following Italy's fake search for a monkey (**FT382:17**), I have found two further examples which stand out from the countless posters requesting help finding lost cats and dogs. In March 2019, posters appeared in the Kronberg region of the Taunus, Germany, warning people to beware of a “highly poisonous” monitor lizard called Wili, which had escaped from the Opel Zoo. The zoo, however, was not missing a giant lizard, as they do not keep any, and said the posters were “a bad joke”; and even if a monitor had escaped, it was still too cold for the animal to survive in the wild. *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 21 Mar 2019.

Next, a poster almost identical to the monkey advert was posted in the region of Verona, most especially in the village of Borgo Venezia, in

June 2019. Under the headline “Lost a snake, it eats meat” and adorned with a picture of a hissing cobra, the poster said: “I lost my snake Max, if you see it, don't go close. It loves meat and hides in the grass.” The poster also provided a phone number to call, but no such number existed. The newspapers regarded it, too, as “a bad joke.” *L'Arena*, 10 June 2019.

### SWISS STONE ROWS

The idea that megalithic monuments can be joined by straight lines called leys has been around for almost 100 years now, and still new sites said to demonstrate such alignments are excavated almost monthly. The two most recent examples were discovered in Switzerland.

The first was unearthed during the construction of an apartment house in the Avenue du Petit-Chasseur in Sitten/Sion, already known for the impressive Chemin des Collines stone row. In 1961, a dolmen





had been excavated some 400m (1,312ft) from the site, and now archæologists have uncovered a double row of six hewn stones, three of which bear carved reliefs. One of the stones, weighing two tonnes, represents a male figure wearing a robe with complex geometric patterns and a belt, his face surrounded by rays. Another stone shows cup markings. The megaliths form a small row, not a 'landscape ley'. The site dates to about 2500 BC. *Bulletin officiel/Amtsblatt*, 2 Aug 2019.

A week earlier, archæologists reported the discovery of another stone alignment in Ticino, the Italian speaking part of Switzerland. At least five massive blocks of stone, each weighing three to four tonnes and measuring 3m (10ft) in height and 1.5m (5ft) in width, were discovered in Claro, near Bellinzona. Smaller stones were also found, and the group can be radiocarbon-dated to 2500 to 2300 BC. 2,000 years later, with the monument still visible, it was turned into a large platform, using the menhirs as building material, explained archæologist Mattia Gillioz. Researchers think the site is especially important, as there were believed to be no megaliths in southern Switzerland. However, only 10 years ago, a massive stone circle was unearthed in Como, a little to the south. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 20 July 2019.

## EURO-CROCS

This summer, although not as hot as last year's, was nevertheless tropical, and saw alleged sightings of crocodiles all over Central Europe. The first was seen and filmed in the Rheinauensee at Bonn, Germany, in May 2019, but was only a joke: it was a remote-controlled croc head and the trick was exposed in the article reporting the incident. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 7 May 2019.

Then came a sighting from the Bürgerseen, between Kirchheim unter Teck and Nürtingen, in Swabia, Germany. A woman had spotted three



ABOVE: Mammatus clouds photographed over Trentino, Italy, in June 2019.

crocodiles in the small lake and called the police, who searched the body of water on the evening of 18 June, soon after the sighting, but without result. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 21 June 2019, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 19 June 2019.

Early in July, a second sighting of small caimans was reported and a second search made, but again it was fruitless. Only one thing was certain: two small caiman models had been found in the lake in the two weeks between the sightings. *Mühlacker Tagblatt*, 4 July 2019.

Meanwhile, on 14 July 2019, an experienced fisherman observed a crocodile in the Hallwilersee near Zurich, Switzerland, prompting a search by police. The man had seen a 1.5m/5ft reptile break the surface around 9.30pm and snap at a young duck. It then swam away with its prey, so it cannot have been a model. Aargau police thought it might be a caiman and set up photo traps and nets, but to no avail. At the end of July, several people contacted police to tell of new encounters with "a crocodile-like animal". *Aargauer Zeitung*, 16+18+21 July 2019.

Early in August, a catfish was caught with a half-digested duck in its stomach, and this

was now thought to have been the trigger for the whole episode. *20min.ch*, 11 Aug 2019; thanks to Markus Hemmler and Andreas Trottmann for clippings.

On 22 July, a crocodile was filmed swimming in the Weser, a large river flowing through Bremen, Germany. Police said they had received no reports, and Alexandra Dörnath, an exotic animal vet, explained that the filmed animal was probably just another model head: "There are no swim movements, and crocodiles move their tails when they swim. I think it is a remote-controlled crocodile – the so-called silly-season-crocodile." *weser-kurier.de*, 23 July 2019.

## FREAK WEATHER

After last summer's drought, this summer brought all kinds of freak weather. Seldom noticed, although fairly common, are the so-called mammatus clouds which hang on the underside of cumulonimbus rainclouds. A fine example was snapped by meteorologist Simone Buttura in June 2019 over Trentino in Italy. *L'Arena*, 11 June 2019.

On 8 June 2019, Ms Hilikka Typpö from Porvoo/Borgå in southern Finland was watching an approaching thunderstorm from her balcony when she

noticed "a ball-like flash", but not from the direction of the storm. She managed to film the phenomenon. "It looked very strange as the ball sort of disintegrated. After I took the video, there was some crackling noise in the parking lot as if the ball had hit something and there was a smell of sulphur. The ball was about 200-300m (656-984ft) away from us." [www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000006136774.html](http://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000006136774.html), as reported by Björn Borg on EuroUfoNet.

Most impressive, however, were the many tornados. The first hit the town of Calarasi, on the Danube in Romania, on 30 April 2019. It carried a bus more than a dozen metres through the air, injuring 12 of the 40 passengers. The whirlwind then came to the village of Dragalina and tore the roofs from several houses. "This is something we only know from the cinema", said Marian Gabriel Stanciu, mayor of Dragalina. *wetter.de*, 2 May 2019.

On 28 July 2019, another tornado, this time a waterspout, hit Lake Constance and was filmed by a worker on the ferry between Friedrichshafen, Germany, and Romanshorn, Switzerland. "It appeared like a monster on the horizon and whirled gigantic masses of water into the air", stated a news report. *Merkur*, 1 Aug 2019.

Then came the devastating tornado in southwestern Luxemburg on the evening of 9 August 2019 which made 100 houses uninhabitable and destroyed more than 180 homes in the villages of Petingen/Petange and Kaerjeng. More than 19 people were injured; and 200 fire fighters, 40 policemen and 50 soldiers were deployed to remove debris from the streets, as the tornado had felled many trees as well as four pylons. It was, as Dan Kersch, Luxemburg's Secretary of State for Employment, put it, "a real catastrophe." *Welt.de*, 10 Aug 2019; *heute TV News* 10 Aug 2019.



## NECROLOG | This month, we bid farewell to a prolific author and fortean all-rounder, and a flamboyant scientist with a taste for hallucinogens and unconventional thinking



### ROSEMARY ELLEN GUILLEY

Guiley was a bestselling author, researcher and investigator in the paranormal and metaphysical fields. She grew up in Anchorage and Seattle, earned a BA in communications at the University of Washington and worked as a journalist in New York. She wrote and compiled around 70 books, including 10 encyclopædias; subjects included hauntings, psychic skills and protection, afterlife studies and spirit communication, cryptids, and alien contact. Her last book published this year, was *Planet Bigfoot*. She was on the board of the Paranormal Romance Guild, which serves the romance fiction industry, and the Foundation for Research into Extraterrestrial Encounters. She was a founding member of the Afterlife Research and Education Institute and a certified hypnotist with the International Hypnosis Federation. She was a Tarot reader, trained in bioenergy and Johrei energy healing, and conducted

dreamwork, intuition/psychic development, and past-life recall sessions.

Her works include *Atlas of the Mysterious in North America*, *The Vengeful Djinn*, *Ouija Gone Wild*, *Slips in Time and Space*, *The Mystical Tarot*, *Black Mirror Scrying*, *Prayer Works: True Stories of Answered Prayer* – and encyclopædias on witchcraft, vampires & werewolves, magic & alchemy, ghosts & spirits, demons & demonology, dreams, angels, and saints. A fortean all-rounder, one might say. Her work was translated into 17 languages. A 2016 book was called *The Zozo Phenomenon*. “For decades,” ran the blurb, “unsuspecting users of spirit boards have been pestered and attacked by a malevolent entity that calls itself Zozo, the ‘king of kings’.” (Curiously, as a six-year-old, FT founding editor Paul Sieveking had a tiny teddy bear he called Zozo. It sits above his computer 63 years later.)

Guiley was a consulting edi-

tor of *Fate Magazine*, eventually becoming the Executive Editor. She made numerous television appearances and was a popular speaker at conferences. Her regular radio features included “Exploring Unexplained Phenomena” with Scott Colborn, and “The Conspiracy Show” with Richard Syrett. She was a frequent guest of George Noory on “Coast to Coast AM,” with whom she co-authored *Talking to the Dead*, about emerging technology for communicating with the dead and other beings.

On her website she stated: “My interest in the paranormal began in childhood, inspired by experiences, extraordinary dreams, an intense interest in astronomy, and a voracious reading of nonfiction and fiction related to the paranormal, occult, science fiction and fantasy. It was clear to me early in life that the paranormal and the unseen realms are real, and that human beings have encounters and experiences that have been documented since ancient times. I undertake field investigations of ghosts, UFOs, aliens, ultraterrestrials, shadow people, bigfoot, mysterious creatures, djinn, demons, angels, fairies and more. Our experiences form patterns throughout history that reveal our constant interaction with dimensions of the afterlife, spirit, the divine, and a wide range of beings. I examine both the light and dark sides of our experiences, from the mystical and angelic to the invasive, demonic, and problematic. To know one side, you must also know the other.”

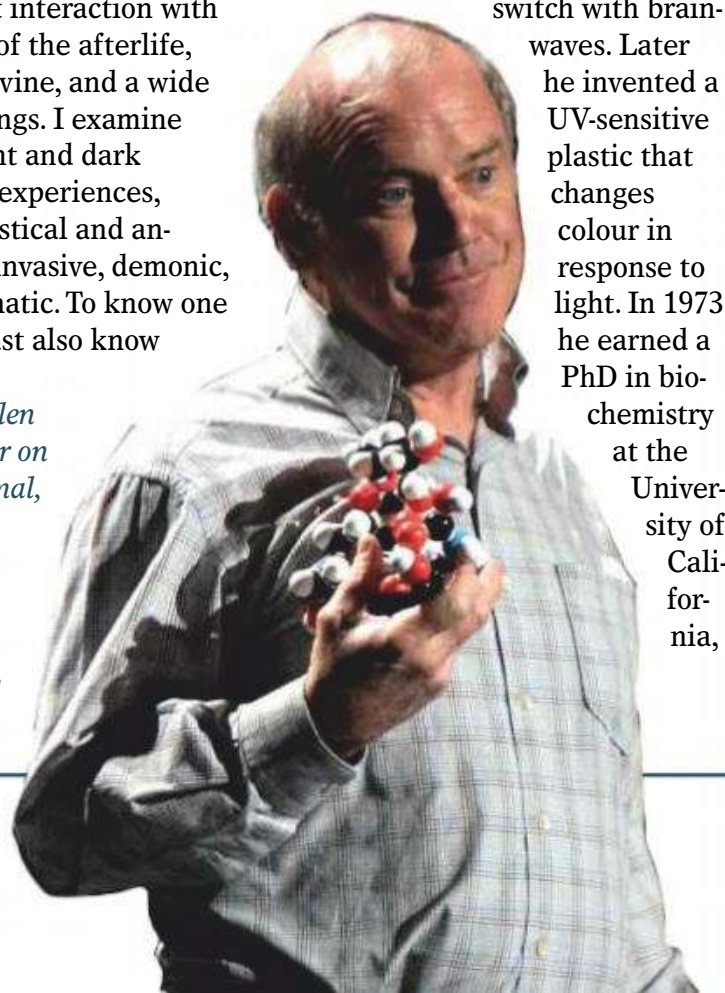
*Rosemary Ellen Guiley, writer on the paranormal, born Florida 8 July 1950; died Milford, Connecticut 18 July 2019, aged 69.*

### KARY MULLIS

Kary Mullis shared the 1993 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his invention of a technique called polymerase chain reaction (PCR), which allowed the amplification a single DNA molecule. He had developed PCR a decade earlier while working for the biotech company Cetus Group in Emeryville, CA. PCR harnesses the cell’s natural mechanism for replicating its DNA, a process that occurs every time a cell divides, and focuses the copying process on a particular gene sequence of interest. The copies are then copied, leading to an exponential chain reaction. The technique has been described as one of the most important scientific inventions of the 20th century – an essential tool for biologists, clinical diagnosticians, forensic scientists and almost anyone else who studies genetic material. A single hair root, or a microscopic bloodstain left at a crime scene, for example, contains ample DNA for PCR.

As an undergraduate chemistry student at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, where he graduated in 1966, Mullis claimed to have invented an electronic device that could control a light

switch with brainwaves. Later he invented a UV-sensitive plastic that changes colour in response to light. In 1973 he earned a PhD in biochemistry at the University of California,







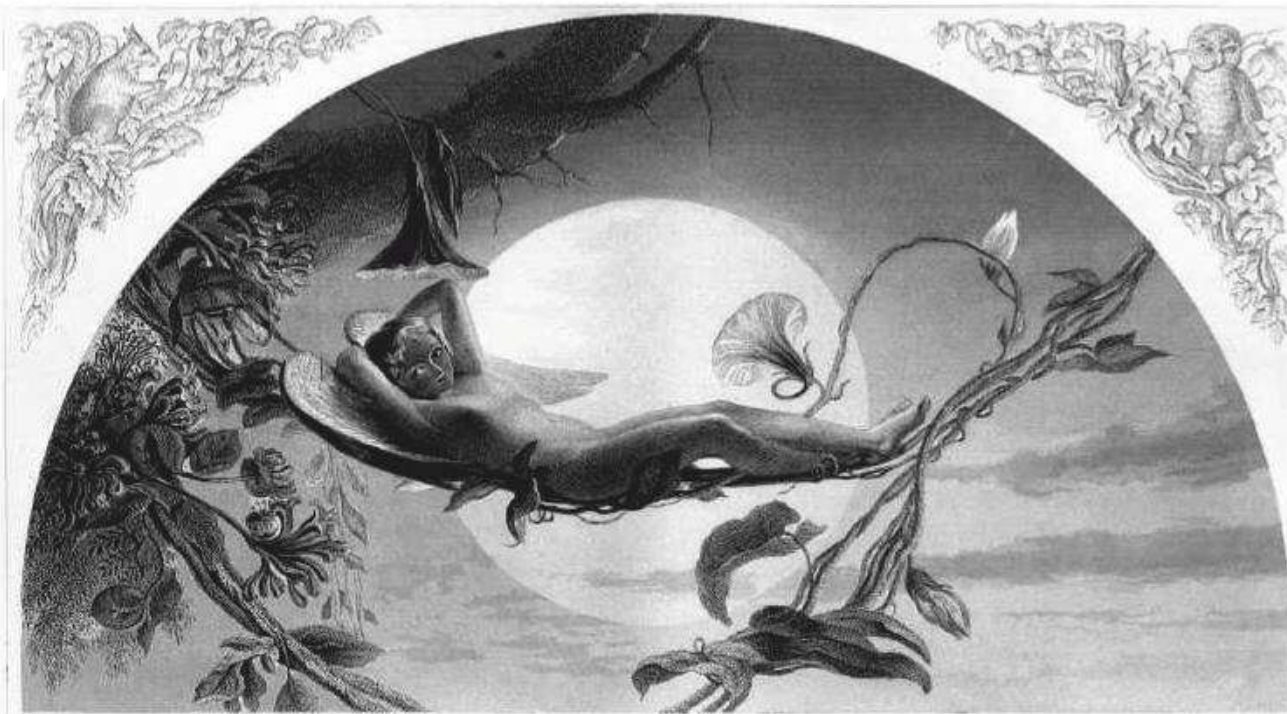
Berkeley, where his interest in hallucinogens blossomed. One acid trip inspired a paper on time travel, “The Cosmological Significance of Time Reversal”, which was subsequently published in *Nature* (#218, pp.663-664, 1968). He once collapsed after inhaling nitrous oxide and woke up with a severe case of frostbite on his face.

In 1998 he published a book of essays about his life, *Dancing Naked in the Mind Field*, in which he claimed to have been rescued from a fatal accident by a person travelling in an astral plane. He also reported an encounter with a fluorescent, “standard extraterrestrial raccoon” at his cabin in the woods of northern California around midnight one night in 1985. He denied being on psychedelic drugs at the time. “‘Good evening, doctor,’ it said. I said something back, I don’t remember what – probably, ‘Hello.’”

Mullis was known as a “weird” figure in science and “flamboyant” philanderer and surfer dude who evangelised the use of LSD, believed in astrology, denied the evidence for both global warming and HIV as a cause of AIDS, and formed a company that sold jewellery embedded with DNA from celebrities such as Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. Here’s a memorable Kary Mullis quotation: “Science has not been successful by making up explanations of things that fit with the current social fabric.”

He relished physical as much as intellectual risks. One friend recalled seeing him in Aspen, Colorado, skiing down the centre of an icy road through fast two-way traffic: “Mullis had a vision that he would die by crashing his head against a redwood tree. Hence he is fearless whenever there are no redwoods.” In the event, he died from pneumonia. He married four times and had a total of three children by two of his wives.

*Kary Banks Mullis, scientist, born Lenoir, North Carolina 28 Dec 1944; died Newport Beach, California 7 Aug 2019, aged 74.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### JENNY GREENTEETH

Many readers will know of Jenny Greenteeth; some may even have grown up with her. She was the ‘bogie’ employed by parents in the Midlands and north-west of England to keep their children from drowning. ‘Jenny Greenteeth will have thee if thee goest on’t river banks!’ shouted worried mothers as their kids looking longingly at deep pools.

Jenny – according to tradition – waited till a child came near, when she would reach out her long arms, take the child’s ankles and yank said child down into the depths where she would devour the bairn at her leisure. The terror is still palpable when you read or listen to the accounts of pensioners who have not been threatened with Jenny for 60 or 70 years. Repeatedly I was informed by contacts that they ‘ran’ past Jenny’s home as kids, while another alumna of the Jenny Terror School described, in 1981, having regular nightmares about the water witch in her infancy before the war.

Now in most corners of Europe there are monsters that are said to live in water and who have green teeth, and these monsters are, well, not very nice. For instance, one German cousin of Jenny would send jets of human blood spouting out of his lake to celebrate a kill. What has surprised me about Jenny is how versatile she was. Read

any encyclopaedia and you will run into a definition that boils down to: ‘lives in water and kills kids’. But when you actually go through the 19th- and early 20th-century material it turns out that Jenny did so much more. I’ve found records of her guarding treasure, haunting a coal mine, living behind peeling wallpaper, feasting on children

in a Liverpool cemetery, riding broomsticks and even checking on tooth decay: this morning, meanwhile, someone wrote to me with an account of how Jenny dwelt in a London airing cupboard for a time.

How did a freshwater fairy become a jack of all trades in this way? My guess is that she was an object of such incredible fear on the part of children that, supercharged, she took on a life of her own. To judge by some of the encounters with

Jenny – one man threw a milk

stool through her ghostly body – she might even be described as an English tulpa: an idea that became real. If there is any truth in this then we should also look at the obsessive thinking of modern children, particularly concerning Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. Some children report meetings with the first and I’ve collected a couple encounters with the latter. A question of being careful what you wish for?

Simon Young’s new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now from Gibson Square.

I’VE FOUND  
JENNY GUARDING  
TREASURE,  
HAUNTING A  
COALMINE AND  
EVEN CHECKING  
ON TOOTH DECAY





## In the Low Information Zone

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

### VERY SMALL STORM: NO CASUALTIES

As few as 75 and perhaps as many as 150 people, depending on which report you read, turned up at the gates of Area 51 on 20 September, and spent their time drinking beer, joshing with the military guard and local sheriff's deputies, practising their Naruto run, and taking selfies. A bit earlier than the 3am scheduled storming, a couple of characters were arrested, one for peeing on the gate, the other, allegedly, for just being pissed. All a bit short of the threatened three million 'stormers'. Even the promised 'Alienstock' music festival organisers decided discretion was the better part of valour, and retreated to a venue in Las Vegas, some distance away, but full, if not of aliens, then of some very strange people. Alternative musical arrangements were made in Rachel, centred on the Little A'Le'Inn. No aliens have been reported to be among the audience. Yet.

### LIZ AND THE UFOs

On 17 September Mick West had an interesting take on UFOs on his metabunk.org blog. Discussing press reports that the US Navy had 'admitted' that 'UFOs' in the now-infamous trio of videos publicised by TTSAAS were 'real', he reflected thus:

"Of course 'UFOs' are 'real'. But 'real' here means that there are objects that people sometimes see that they can't identify. Maybe they are planes, birds, or balloons, maybe they are alien spaceships or ghosts. But to the UFO enthusiast who thinks that UFO = Aliens, then 'UFOs are real' has a very different meaning.

"UFOs exist in what I call the Low Information Zone (the LIZ). That's the physical region around you (or your camera) just beyond the distance where you can make out what something is. The LIZ is a curious thing in that it expands and contracts based on the lighting conditions, the size and shape of the object, the quality of your eyesight, the presence of optical aids like telescopes, and the resolution and zoom of your camera.

"The Navy pilots have a LIZ in any given situation (they probably even have an acronym of their own for it). Radar can only go so far and does not always give you much information beyond position and sometimes speed. FLIR cameras have only so much zoom. The human eye has shorter limits and is subject to a variety of confounding factors.

"So, regardless of any belief about aliens or secret technology of some sort, whenever you detect something flying in the LIZ, then that's... a UFO simply because there's not enough information to identify it.



MARIO TAMA / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: One of the people who did actually turn up at the gates of Area 51 in Nevada on 20 September.

"If you were to suddenly change the size of the LIZ, to expand it by getting out your 10x binoculars, then the UFO often becomes an IFO. Sometimes the expansion does not work, because the object is *still* in the Low Information Zone, the LIZ.

"And that's what we have here. There are three objects, FLIR1, Gimbal and Go Fast, that are far enough away that you can't make out what they are. All the videos use the maximum optical zoom, so the pilots have pushed out the LIZ as far as it will go. FLIR1 (*Nimitz*) is tens of miles away and in a very low-resolution video, and so appears as an indistinct blob. Gimbal has no range specified but seems to be obscured by an infrared glare, probably from the engines. It rotates optically. Go Fast is 'only' 3.4 nautical miles away, but is so small (maybe six feet wide) that it occupies only a few pixels on-screen, and so again is an indeterminate blob.

"So yes, 'UFOs' are real because there are always going to be objects flying in the LIZ... that we can't identify... As many people have observed in different ways since the dawn of UFOs, the border of the LIZ has been expanding over time.

"Of course, [this has] raised some very difficult questions about why the distance to UFOs always just exceeds the power of the camera. You can't eliminate especially sneaky or lucky aliens, but it really does seem to point to the phenomena being just ordinary things that are too far away.

"Back in the good old days when you were lucky to be carrying a Kodak Instamatic when you saw a UFO, the photos were relatively close.... *But as technology improved, the LIZ got further away, but the UFOs move with the LIZ, just beyond where we could tell what they*

*actually were, and the quality of the images remained about the same, even though now the LIZ is tens of miles out.*" [My emphasis]

This reminded me of another peculiarity of UFOs: the phenomenon known as 'cultural tracking' (a phrase coined, I believe, by Jenny Randles, 'er next door). Before there were any functioning airships, there was plenty of talk, with suitable illustrations, of them in the popular prints. In the 1890s, lighter-than-air dirigibles were the coming big thing, and duly appeared in the skies, sometimes with men from Mars or Venus aboard. When everyone was flying biplanes and triplanes, mystery monoplanes appeared. Rocketry, first decisively successful in World War II, had a brief heyday in Scandinavia in 1946. They were eclipsed by the saucers, which were certainly out of reach, as a functioning mode of transport, but those who peeped inside them reported dials and control levers at first; digital readouts and computer-like controls appeared about the same time as digital watches and pocket calculators. When string theories emerged into public view in the late 1970s, the interdimensional theory of UFOs soon followed (string theories requiring more dimensions than our quotidian four). And we haven't even touched on the role played by popular fiction in shaping perceptions of UFOs and their occupants – the aliens' spindly necks and all-black eyes from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, for example. Cultural tracking, we can see, presents UFO technology as just ahead of or parallel to our own. The Low Information Zone likewise reveals UFOs to be always, inexplicably (or perhaps not), just out of reach – and there, I wager, they will always stay.





## Arresting investigations

JENNY RANGLES looks back at some occasions on which police became involved in UFO cases

A UFO was investigated by police and treated as a criminal assault in a remarkable case that took place in Scotland 40 years ago this autumn. Malcolm Robinson has just published a fascinating book, *The Dechmont Woods UFO Incident* (available at Amazon, £13.99), about his investigation of the woodland outside Edinburgh where a forester came upon the hovering UFO. Malcolm is a respected UFO researcher, active in the field for decades, and the perfect person to write about what is probably Scotland's most famous UFO event. The incident in question culminated in an 'attack' by two small spikey objects resembling 'mines' that emerged from the UFO causing serious effects to the witness (**FT30:31, 56:48-49**). The object left physical traces on the ground, which was cordoned off by the Police and subjected to a forensic study, while the matter was treated as a potential attack by unknown assailants.

Coincidentally, the first investigation into a potential crime actually committed in space has just begun, with astronaut Anne McClain, aboard the International Space Station, being quizzed about accessing files involving her estranged wife via NASA servers. McClain is considered a frontrunner to be the first woman to walk on the Moon in the Artemis lander missions planned for the mid 2020s, so this case attracted attention.

Given the confluence of these two events it seemed apt to look at other UFO incidents where police were involved and possible crimes investigated. Indeed, one of the first people to risk prosecution for hoaxing a UFO encounter is presently hoping to take paying passengers into outer space aboard his Virgin Galactic spacecraft; 30 years earlier, Sir Richard Branson, head of Virgin, had the distinction of upsetting the 'Star Cops'.

At 4 am on 1 April 1989 Branson took off in his balloon – custom-built to look like a saucer-shaped UFO complete with strobe light – passing over the busy M25 during the morning rush hour; the resulting 'close encounter' generated calls to media and, of course, the police, who were soon on the scene. Branson had intended to land in Hyde Park but winds forced him down prematurely in a field. By then, patrol cars were in pursuit and ready to greet the little green men with a big fat summons. They surrounded the site and one brave officer went to intercept the imminent invasion which, given the date, was presumed to be an April Fool's hoax. Nonetheless, so well designed was Branson's UFO 'landing' that it caused chaos and could have distracted drivers enough to cause accidents. The PC sent to meet the



invaders was greeted with dry ice emerging from the balloon and a dwarf wearing an ET-like costume stepping into the field. Rather than being taken to our leader, this visitor from the sky was very nearly escorted to the nearest holding cell – but police ultimately saw the funny side and decided not to charge anyone involved.

Sir Richard was fortunate that he didn't carry out his stunt over Manchester, because when asked by a local radio programme in 1975 how they would handle a UFO landing within their constituency, the authorities were forthright: "We would, of course, arrest it for illegal parking of a space vehicle," was the seemingly straight-faced reply from the official spokesperson. Manchester police were almost tested on this question on 2 July 2000 when a man from Wythenshawe reported being struck on the head while in his garden: his assailant was an object falling from space that set his hat on fire! Our local UFO team investigated, with the help of meteor experts at Jodrell Bank who quickly rejected that possibility. Police offered to get involved if we uncovered evidence that an assault "by unknown forces" was involved. Happily, we never did, as the damage to the hat and a small yellow rock found on the ground proved unconnected. Analysis done for us at a local university lab showed the rock was a small sample of lead sulphide, likely part of a display removed from its setting before being tossed into the garden.

Somewhat less fortunate was a late-night car driver who ran afoul of the Lancashire police, who pulled him over for going too fast over a narrow bridge while dressed in his nightclothes. Trying to escape punishment, he explained that he was hurrying to report the UFO that had just passed overhead. Officers simply issued a warning to be more careful next time ET came calling.

That was a proportionate response compared to that of police patrolling the province of Mendoza, Argentina, in September 1968, when they were inundated with UFO sightings. Determined to end the temptation to hoax more cases, they issued an official communiqué informing locals

that "the spreading of flying saucer rumours is an offence to be penalised by law". The relevant law allowed for them to send to prison anyone "maliciously" reporting a UFO incident that did not take place. It is unclear how successful that deterrent proved.

But if the Argentine force thought they had problems, these were nothing compared with those facing cops in Rosmead, East Cape Province, South Africa, on 12 November 1972. Three soldiers guarding a fuel dump at an army base watched a red ball floating over a tennis court at a local school. Police were called to investigate as the school principal arrived to find the court severely damaged, with the surface churned up beneath where the UFO hovered. The local district police commandant was sent to investigate the damage and found a bluegum tree beside the court dying after seemingly being seared by intense heat. Despite extensive efforts, the matter was never resolved.

My favourite personal police story takes us back to the Manchester force on 1 December 1978, just three years after their promise to arrest a landed UFO. True to their word, they gave it a go. I awoke that morning and saw a very bright light in the sky which I watched for some time. Although I knew what I was watching, I verified it was the planet Venus, very bright as the 'morning star'. At lunchtime a witness phoned me to describe how he and his wife had seen a strange craft over meadows by the River Mersey in Urmston – right in line with where I had observed Venus at the same time. However, he insisted that after going out in the early gloom to 'pursue' the object he got close and saw that it was a structured shape, like a beehive. He called the police and two officers went out to the meadows and witnessed the 'craft' for themselves. They walked towards it, ready to enforce the law if necessary...

Very quickly this case escalated out of all proportion, hyped by the media, and the involvement of the police added gravity to the affair. Four days later, I was invited onto local TV, where rather than extol the significance of this sighting I advised viewers that the UFO would return the following morning and they could watch it for themselves! Because, of course, it was Venus and would be more or less in the same spot for days.

The police accepted the solution with good grace, but years later I was told by a rather huffy UFO enthusiast that I must have been in the pay of the government because too many people – including reliable coppers – had seen 'them' and I could never 'debunk' the truth...



# WHERE GHOSTS GATHER

In 1977, Usborne published *World of the Unknown: Ghosts*, the children's book that inspired a generation of junior fortune tellers. Four decades on, following a concerted fan campaign, the book is back in print... and the perpetually haunted **BOB FISCHER** tracked down its pleasantly surprised writer, Christopher Maynard, to discuss its genesis and unexpected impact.

The man responsible for some of my more potent childhood nightmares is sitting opposite me at a picnic table in Old Spitalfields Market, basking in the syrupy east London sunshine of a late summer's afternoon and – quite frankly – he's at it again.

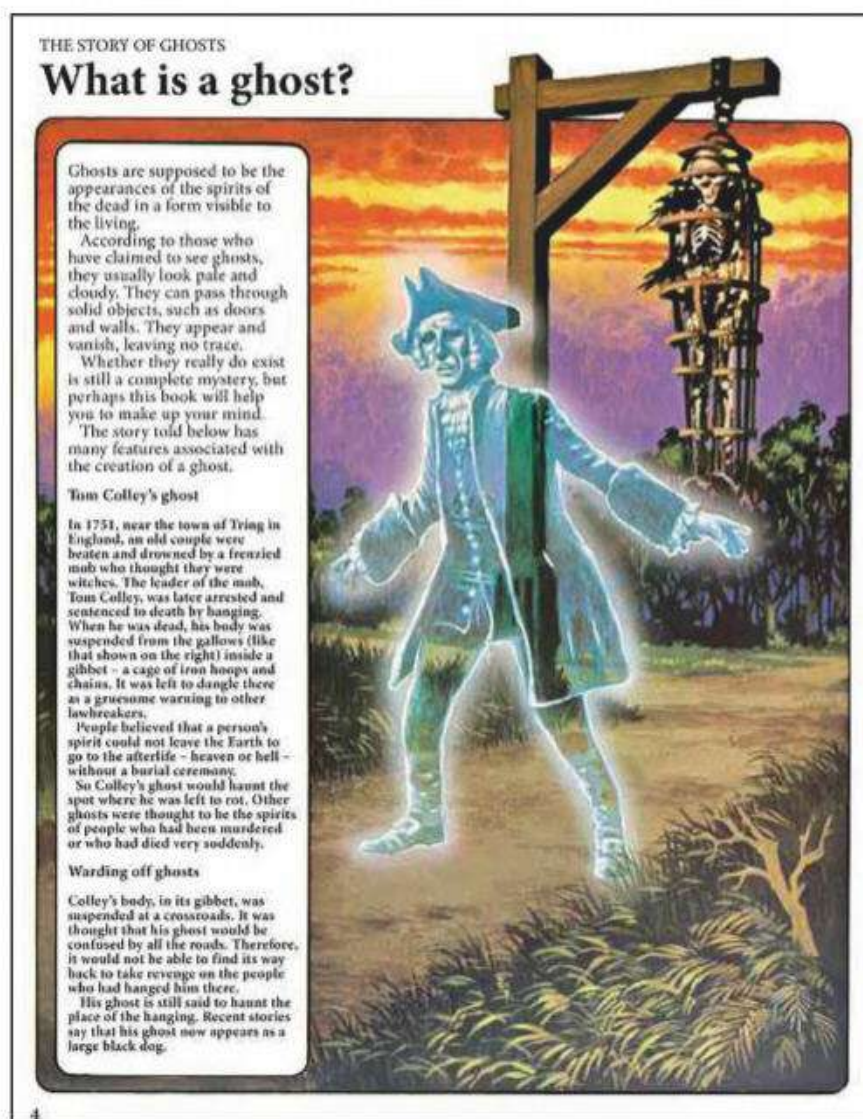
"There was an animal called the Behinder," says Christopher Maynard, in the mellifluous Montreal accent that has lost none of its delicious resonance since he left his native Canada for post-swinging London in the early 1970s. "You can tell when you're being followed by a Behinder, because the hairs on the back of your neck prickle, and stand up. And the way to *check* that you're being followed by a Behinder... when that happens, whip around really fast. If there's nothing there, but you've still got that feeling, you know you're being followed..."

Good grief, Chris. What do they look like?

"You can feel them, sense them, almost taste the fear they engender, but *see* them? Never! I've heard tell that you would drop dead if you ever saw one face to face. Though I take that with a pinch of salt."

Forty years on, the architect of my 1970s night terrors is proving to be brilliant, engaging, and very funny company.

In 1977, Chris poured this fascination with the ghost stories of his Canadian childhood – told in hushed tones around the crackling fires of woodland summer camps – into a book that became a ubiquitous, and thrilling, mainstay of every British school library for years to follow. *Ghosts* was one of the earliest successes of the nascent Usborne Publishing house, one third of a trio of books issued under the umbrella title *The World of the Unknown*... the others being, inevitably, *Monsters* and *UFOs*. Its 32 pages are packed with tales of ancient hauntings, outlandish folklore and indispensable practical advice for primary school-age children with a healthy curiosity



LEFT: Gibbets and ghosts at the crossroads: the terrible tale of Tom Colley's ghost. FACING PAGE: Chris Maynard.

*Shiver and Shake* comics.

"Peter Usborne, the owner of the company, would be sitting in the bath," laughs Chris, "and he would think 'Let's do something on dinosaurs. Fossils and dinosaurs... and then we'll do something on the Ice Age and we'll bundle it up.' And somewhere along the way, the idea of folklore came up... which is why *Ghosts* was bundled with *Monsters*, which was bundled with *UFOs*. He would have just come in and tossed it onto the pile, and the editorial teams would have picked it up and said 'Yeah, we'll take that one.' And that was it, that was the brief."

So was it something that Chris actually pitched to write?

"I really can't remember! Most likely what happened was that somebody would have come in and said, 'Chris, these are the books we're thinking of doing over the next year, which ones do you fancy running with?' And I'd say 'Yeah, I'll

do the *Ghosts* one... that'll be a lot more fun.' It just struck me as something that I could have a shot at. It struck a funny bone."

"UFOs," he confides, bashfully, "are not my cup of tea."

## NIGHT TERRORS

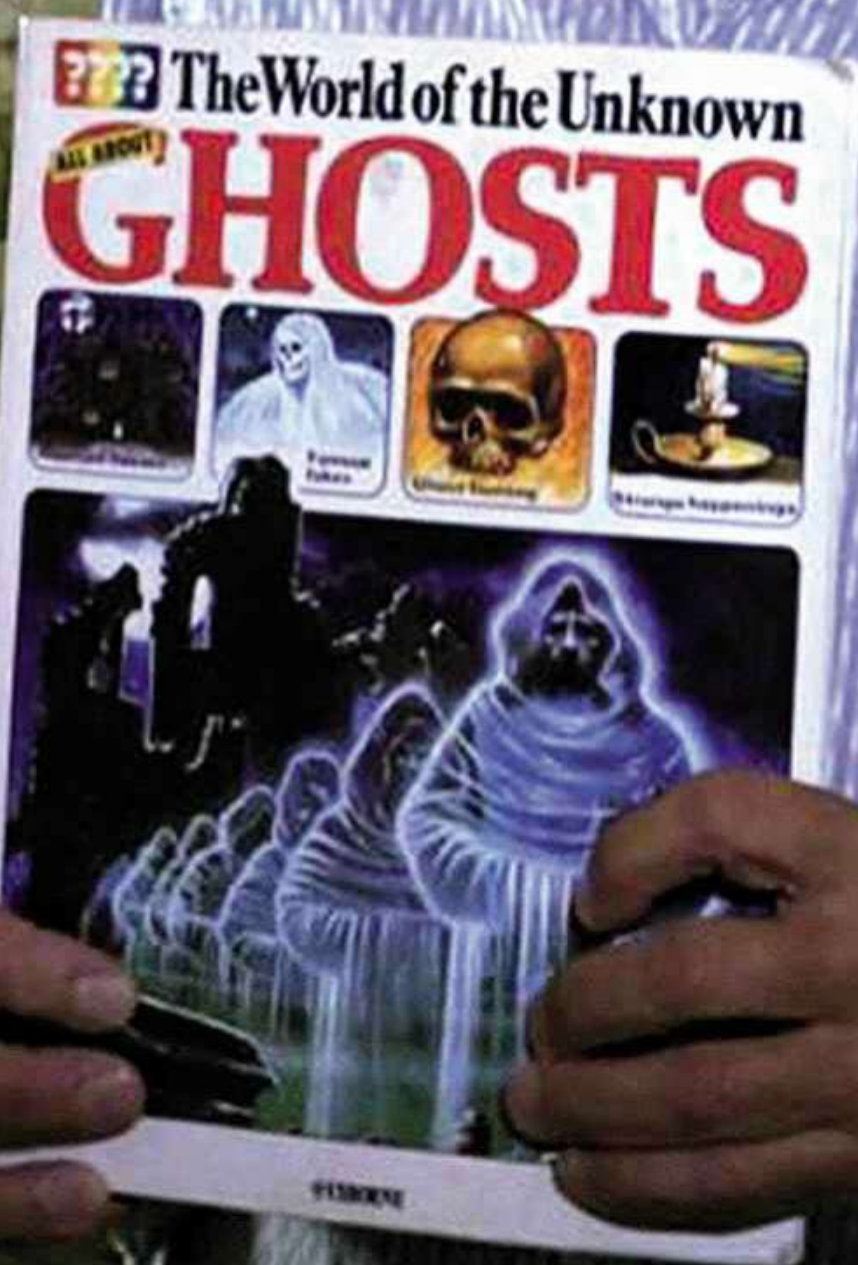
I was around seven years old when I first discovered the book, nestling in a shadowy corner of Levensale Primary School's modest library, somewhere between Willard Price's *Safari Adventure*, a well-thumbed haul of Target's *Doctor Who* novelisations, and a dusty, shamefully-neglected collection of the *Children's Britannica*. I can still remember the head-freezing pall of terror that enveloped me upon my first glimpse of a randomly opened page; the collection of "Mystery Photographs" that swam back and forth through my nightmares for months to follow.

There was the glowing, spectral figure of a woman in a flowing, formal gown,

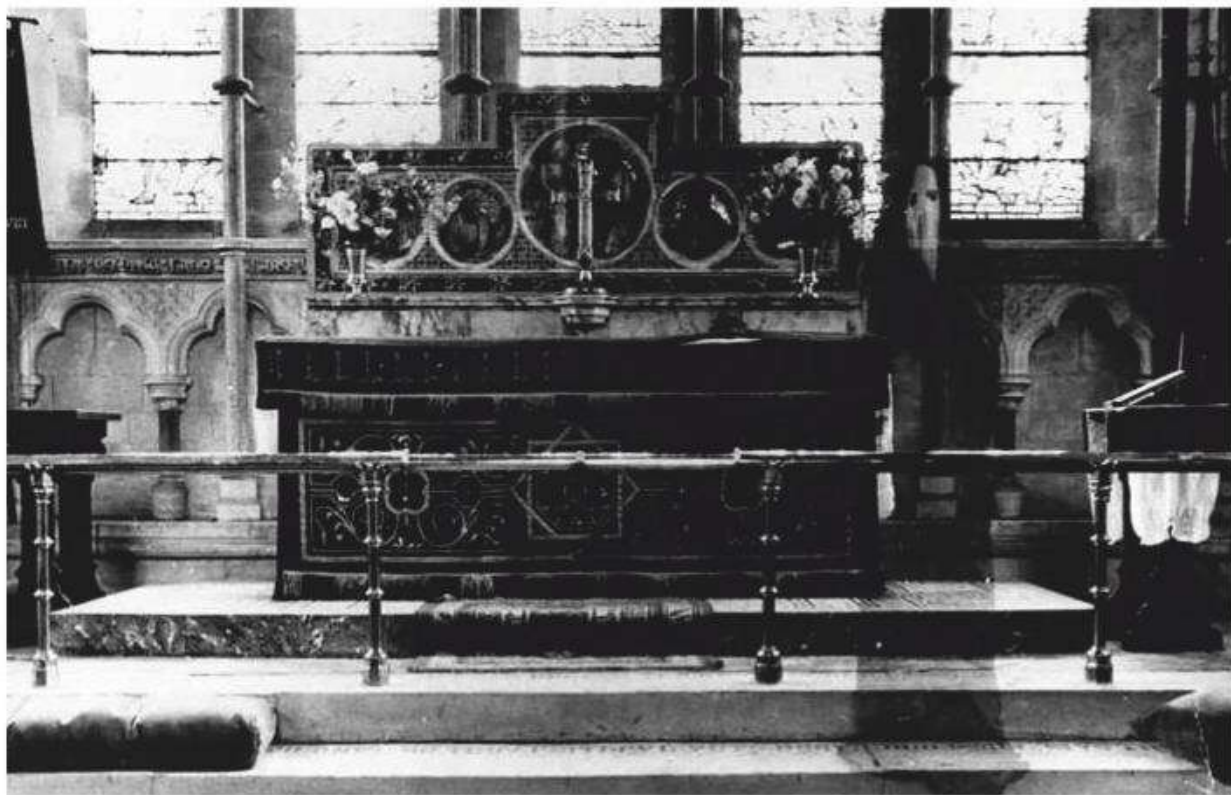
## The book became a ubiquitous mainstay of school libraries

about what lies beyond the veil. Lovingly and vividly illustrated, it strikes a perfect balance between comic-book dynamism and factual reportage, all seemingly custom-designed to fire the imaginations of a generation of youngsters whose formative years had already been delightfully tainted by an upsurge of interest in all things supernatural. This, remember, was the decade of *Rentaghost*; of Hammer, Amicus and Tigon films; of Horror Top Trumps and









**ABOVE LEFT:** One of the most famous ghost photos ever taken – the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The spectral monk in a photo “taken in the early 1960s by the vicar of a church in England”. **BELOW:** Mr Chinnery on his way to visit the grave of his mother-in-law – who appears to be sitting behind him.

descending the stairs of Raynham Hall in Norfolk, captured on camera in 1936. There was the grinning driver of a 1950s Hillman Minx, entirely oblivious to the spirit of his recently-deceased mother-in-law, sitting expectantly on the back seat behind him. And – most chilling of all – there was the translucent figure of a spectral monk beside an elaborate altar, “taken in the early 1960s by the vicar of a church in England”. The hollow eyes of this latter apparition, two ragged holes cut into a white death shroud, seemed to bore into the very fibre of my being. I was convinced that my inadvertent eye contact with this terrifying spirit had, effectively, alerted the agents of the paranormal to my existence, and that a parade of malevolent ghosts, spectres and poltergeists, headed by the towering, black-robed monk himself, would be gliding silently up the stairs to claim me in my sleep

## *The hollow eyes seemed to bore into the very fibre of my being*

that very evening. As Chris’s text solemnly declares: “All three of these pictures are considered by experts to be genuine.”

If the experts were convinced, then so was I.

And yet this proto-panic attack inexplicably failed to deter me from investigating the rest of the book, and being somehow both terrified *and* intrigued by the

stories within. I discovered “Tom Colley’s Ghost”, the spirit of the 19th century mob-leader, whose restless spirit was shackled to the rotting remains of his gibbeted body. In Tring. I winced at the fate of the phantoms of the Battle of Shiloh, grimly and ceaselessly re-enacting this brutal 1862 conflict of the American Civil War. I read wide-eyed about the Arabian “Afrit” ghost, whose rising could only be prevented by the driving of a fresh nail into the bloodstain of its associated murder victim; and of “Black Shuck”, the demon dog that haunted “lonely country roads, graveyards and old gallows sites”, distinguished by its “single cyclops-eye, as large as a saucer, in the centre of its forehead.”

And, obviously, I vowed never to set foot in “The Village With a Dozen Ghosts”: namely Pluckley, whose assorted spooks are vividly described beneath photographs of their respective haunts, all laid out on a detailed road map of this sleepy Kent idyll. Keen to hook up with the “White Lady of Dering”? Head for the burnt-out husk of Surrenden Dering manor, where she still glides silently through what remains of the library. From there, it’s a short walk to the church of Saint Nicholas, where the 12th century ‘Red Lady’ – “buried in a sumptuous gown with a red rose in her hands” – stalks the graveyard. Cross over Dicky Buss’s Lane to find “the hanging body of the schoolmaster”, a victim of suicide in the aftermath of World War I, whose phantom corpse, suspended from a laurel tree, “is said to be visible to this day, swinging in the breeze”. And then, on your way back to the railway station, pay your regards to “the ghost of the screaming man”, a brickworks employee “smothered to death when a wall of clay fell on him”, whose spirit still “screams in the same way as he did when he died”.





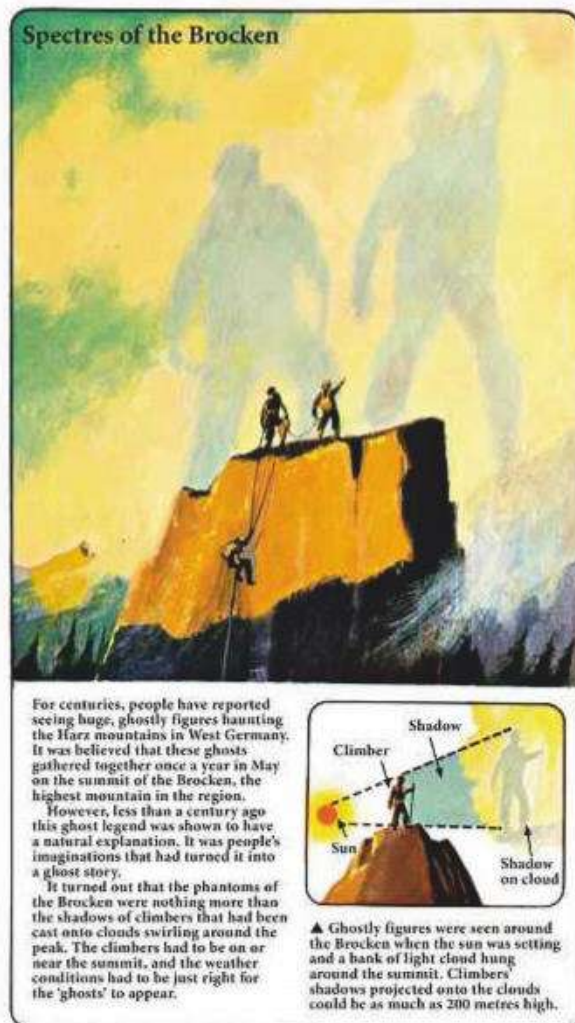
## RESEARCHING THE UNKNOWN

The book is an extraordinary feat of research, and I was intrigued to note that folklorist Eric Maple had been credited as ‘Special Consultant’. Maple, born in 1916 in Essex, was the son of a Spiritualist medium and a voracious collector of folk and occult tales; his magnificently titled works *The Dark World of Witches*, *The Realm of Ghosts* and *The Domain of Devils* forming a quintessentially 1960s triumvirate of books, published – entirely appropriately – by Pan.

“When I started doing research in libraries,” remembers Chris, “I realised that Eric Maple had a long pedigree. We tracked him down, and got in touch with him, and he’d been researching and writing folklore books for years. We wanted him as an advisor, as much to help me wade through this *mountain* of stuff that was out there. I was working through public libraries at the time, and he would have steered me towards newspaper libraries as well.”

The Society for Psychical Research is credited too, along with its one-time rival, the sadly defunct National Laboratory of Psychical Research. Chris has fond memories of making contact with a community of paranormal enthusiasts and societies that were arguably enjoying their heyday in a 1970s Britain whose fascination with the otherworldly frequently crossed over into the mainstream media.

“They were these wonderful, eccentric little corners that we only discovered as we were working,” he smiles. “And they all had cuttings libraries – they’d been amassing folklore for years. And they would have regular symposia for people around the country... for all I know, people around the world. I never figured out the depth of all this. So they would be a real source of stuff



that might not be in the broader public domain. That was really helpful, and Eric was particularly good at steering us to those kinds of places, and winking out little bits and pieces.”

The double-page spread on Pluckley, however, was the result of an expedition made by Chris and Usborne art director David Jefferis, a day of bona fide ghost-hunting that makes him especially proud. “I like the fact that we did Pluckley,” he beams. “We went and did the research in the field. It was great, really delicious. We

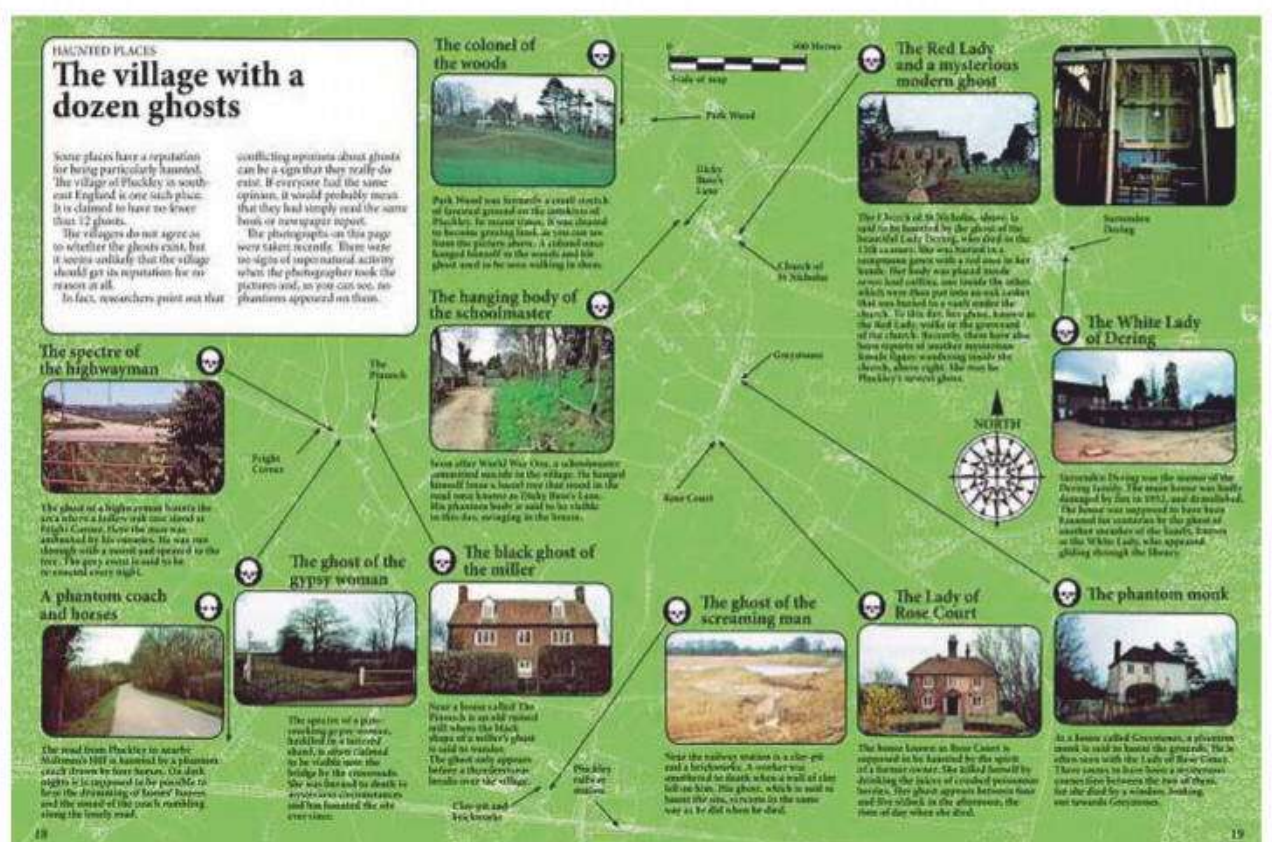
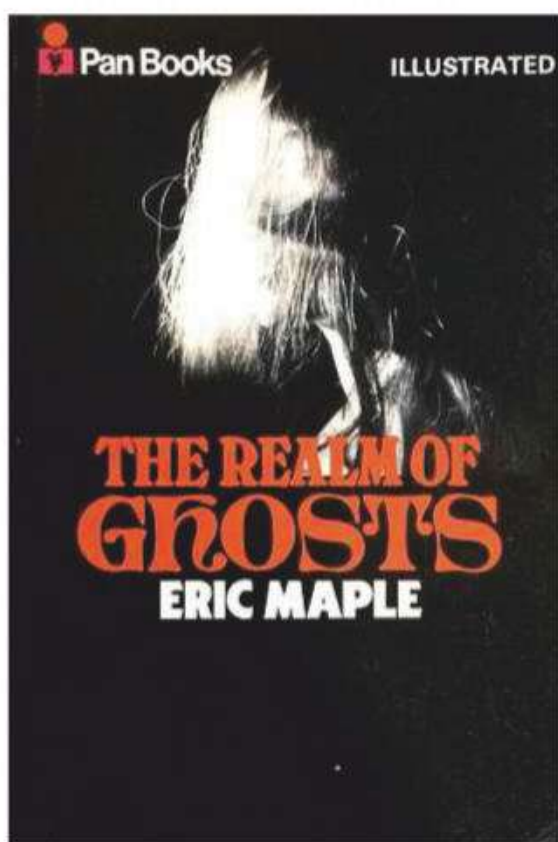
had the demented idea that we had to overlay it onto a map, so that was the one occasion when we actually took ourselves out and spent a day wandering around... and to my way of thinking at the time, it was a particularly successful page. *This* was important...” (We have a copy of the book on the table, open at the Pluckley double spread, and Chris is pointing proudly at one particular illustration.) “The compass! We wanted you to be able to orientate yourself, and made it a map where you could actually locate these various objects...”

But did any unsuspecting members of the Pluckley public not wonder why two strange men were wandering around their village all afternoon, taking photographs?

“I suspect,” laughs Chris, “if they had seen us, they would have thought we were estate agents! Or someone from the council. Why else would you be taking pictures of houses, and measuring up?”

## AN ISLAND OF KNOWING

Reading *Ghosts* as an adult, it's clear that my seven-year-old self overreacted somewhat; certainly with regard to a curious period of 1980, when I became convinced that the White Lady of Dering had forsaken Pluckley for the wardrobe in our spare room. Although the stories and illustrations presented within are as chilling as I remember, the book frequently adopts a laudable stance of objective distance, and is filled with reminders for young readers to form their own judgements. “Ghosts are supposed to be the appearances of the spirits of the dead in a form visible to the living,” reads Chris's introduction. “Whether they really do exist is still a complete mystery, but perhaps this book will help you to make up your mind.”



TOP: The Spectres of the Brocken explained. ABOVE LEFT: Eric Maple, “a voracious collector of folk and occult tales” acted as a special consultant on the book. ABOVE RIGHT: The book’s double-page map of Pluckley, complete with compass, cataloguing a dozen ghosts reported from the sleepy Kent village.



Elsewhere, there are accounts of “ghost stories” subsequently explained away as the results of flooded sewers and amplified alarm clocks, and – my favourite – the 200 metre-tall “Spectres of the Brocken” on the summit of a German mountain, which transpired to be the shadows of climbers, cast onto banks of cloud by a gently setting Sun. The unambiguously titled section “Sense or Nonsense”? even includes a bar chart displaying the results of an 1890 survey of 17,000 people; a mere 1,684 of whom claimed to have had a supernatural experience. Was all of this, I bravely ask, something of a forteen approach?

“We adopted that,” nods Chris. “We stood back... we were the scientists. We were the researchers. And we just brought to the table the things that needed to be told and explained. We would have done exactly the same if we’d done a book about aeroplanes: we would have talked not as a manufacturer, not as a passenger, but purely in a factual way with that deadpan style... in fact, deadpan is precisely what it was! And my own feeling now, reflecting on what yourself and what other people have been saying, talking about your memories... I’ve come to realise the extent to which that approach made it possible for youngsters to engage with the material. Not because it was a rip-roaring story – they got their rip-roaring stories from somewhere else – but because this was just factual, and their own

imaginings could then pick that up and run with it and go... what if that’s real? Did I actually see that? What did my sister tell me that time? And that’s where, suddenly, the fascination comes in.”

Given this approach, is Chris slightly disconcerted that the book proved so terrifying to at least one unsuspecting seven-year-old?

“Thrilling’ works better for me than ‘terrifying’!” he laughs. “I would probably have been mildly shocked if someone said ‘You know... you’re going to scare the Bejesus out of kids.’ I wanted the kids to take something away, and feel that they owned a bit of knowledge, and had an insight into something about the world, an insight that might return fuller and more complete. They could sit down at the dinner table with their parents and expound... display what they had learned, talk about it, ask questions, ask their grandparents, run with it... that kind of thing. Start a conversation that would build upon this little pool, this little island of *knowing* that they had extracted.”

### THE GHOSTS WALK AGAIN

Since its publication, *Ghosts* has become a totemic symbol of the “haunted” childhood. The day after our meeting, I tweeted a photo of Chris holding up a rare, pristine copy of the original edition (a book I had to borrow from Usborne’s offices on the way

to meet him; they’ve become an incredibly scarce collector’s item), and awaited the reaction. By the end of the day, 411 likes and 75 retweets later, I had been overwhelmed by a cavalcade of Proustian nostalgia from fellow children of the 1970s. “To the mid-40s set, he’s like our fourth dad – the other three being your actual dad (or stepfather or guardian), your favourite male teacher, and of course, Geoffrey from *Rainbow*,” tweeted writer and podcaster Paul Childs. “Chris Maynard is responsible for the person I am now!” added author and paranormal investigator Robert Johns, whereas fellow supernatural enthusiast Justin Cowell was merely full of gratitude. “I sincerely hope you thanked Chris for scaring generations of children,” he tweeted. “Some of whom were inspired enough to never stop being fascinated by this intriguing, delicious subject!”

Meanwhile, the most astute observation came from the shadowy mastermind behind the *Things That Go Bump* Youtube channel: “I bet Mr Maynard has no idea how many people consider him a hero and an inspiration...”

“No idea,” confirms Chris. “I’m over the moon. I mean, we all dreamed that what we were doing was important. We told ourselves that. We’d sit in the pub after work, and we’d say ‘you know... we’re knocking these books out, and yeah... we’re making life better. We’re giving kids tons of things to read.’ But

#### HAUNTED PLACES

### The haunted house

Many ghosts haunt one particular place, such as the house where they once lived. These haunting spirits are seen time and time again, wandering through the house.

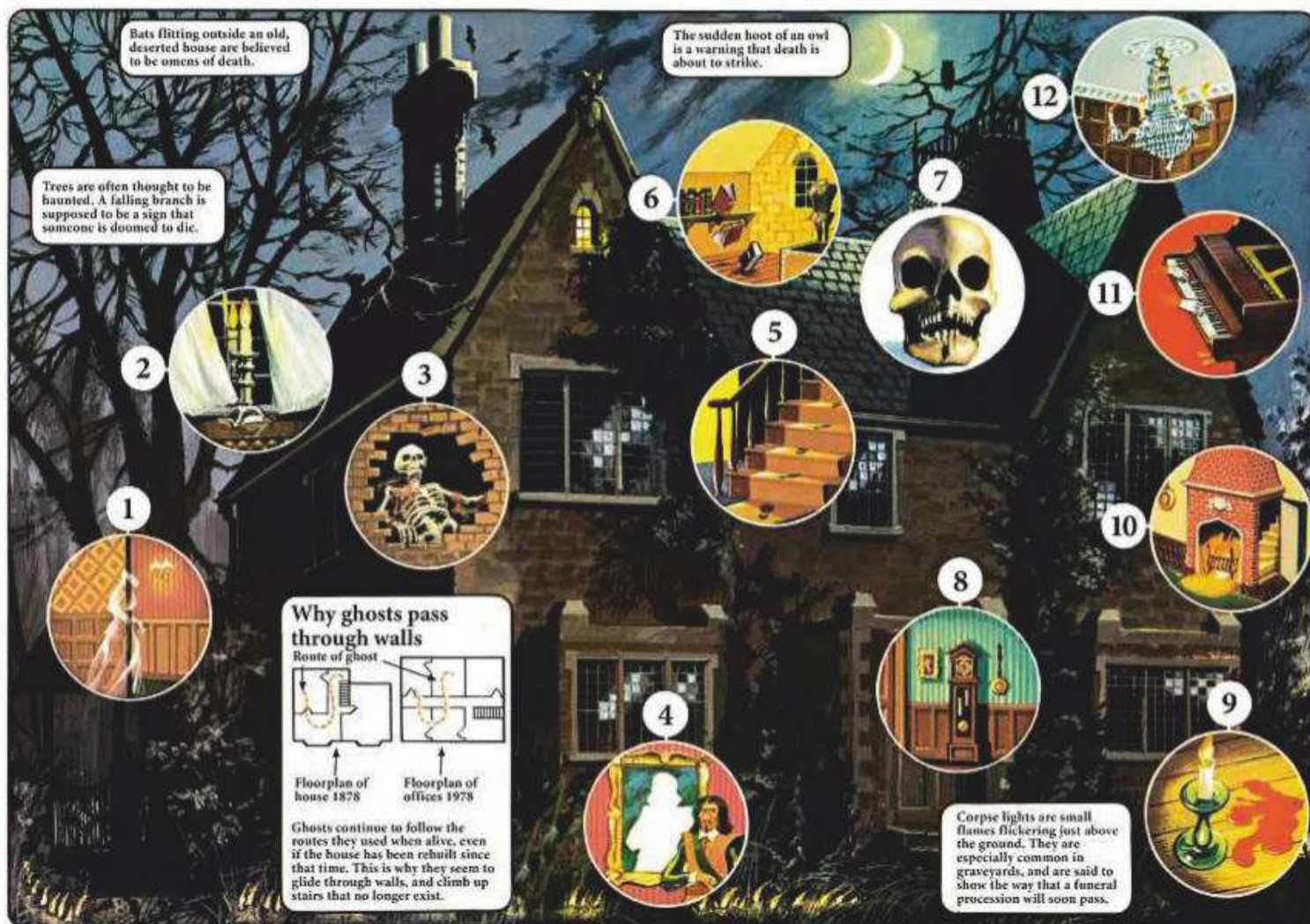
Haunting ghosts are thought to occur because of a violent or dramatic event in the past that links a spirit to a place. Houses where a brutal crime was committed or someone was bitterly unhappy are often haunted.

Some of the strange noises that make people think a house is haunted are caused by natural events, such as the creaking of shrinking and expanding timbers, or the sound of rats and mice scurrying about.

#### Inside the house

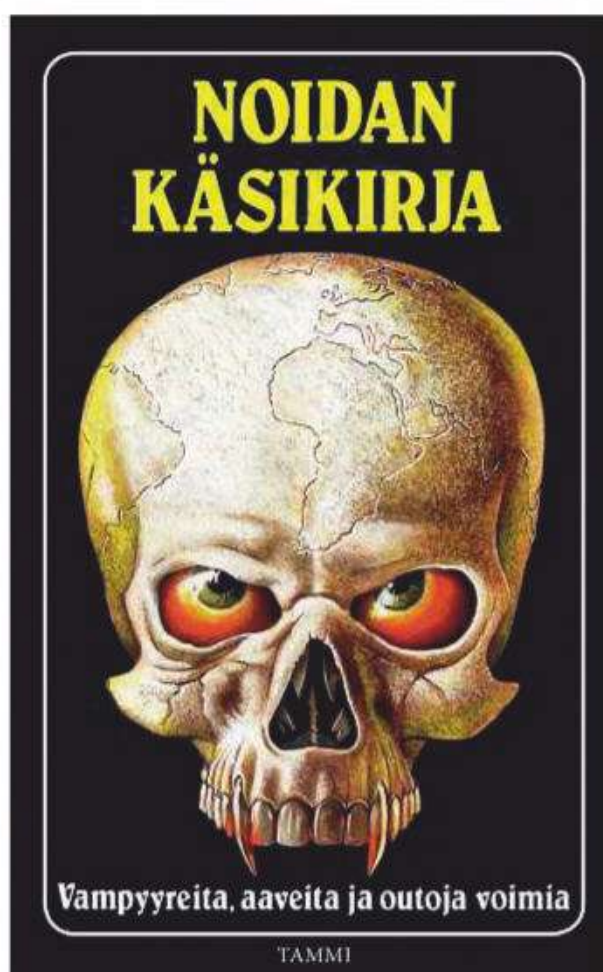
Many strange things can occur in a haunted house. Here are some of them. The numbers below link with the numbers on the picture.

- 1 A ghostly figure glides from room to room, passing straight through solid walls.
- 2 The curtains in a closed room start swaying in a mysterious breeze.
- 3 A skeleton is found walling up inside a hidden secret room.
- 4 The ghost of an old ancestor materializes in front of its own, suddenly blank portrait.
- 5 Muddy footprints appear on the stairway as the thud of slow, heavy footsteps is heard.
- 6 In the attic, objects move and fall to the floor while strange thumpings and bangings are heard.
- 7 An old skull screams whenever it is moved from the house to be buried.
- 8 A grandfather clock chimes thirteen, foretelling a death in the family.
- 9 A bloodstain on the floor cannot be removed. No matter how many times it is washed away, it always comes back.
- 10 Groaning sounds come from a secret, cobweb-choked passage that leads from the fireplace to an upstairs room.
- 11 A pair of white-gloved hands appears at the piano and begins to play a funeral march.
- 12 Unseen forces set a chandelier swaying so violently that pieces of crystal crash to the floor.



ABOVE: A splendid double-page spread detailing the sights and sounds associated with a haunted house, from screaming skulls to irremovable bloodstains.





BOB FISCHER

ABOVE LEFT: Big in Finland: *Noidan Käsikirja* has a large fanbase. ABOVE RIGHT: Chris Maynard (left) and Bob Fischer share that spooky feeling.

we never could measure it. There were no 'likes', there was no Internet, there was no social media, no real awareness." *Ghosts* was only one of "about 80" non-fiction books that Chris wrote in a 20-year period from the mid 1970s onwards, and was published at a time that he now considers to be a halcyon era for the industry ("It was like producing music at the time of the Beatles and the Stones," he tells me. "To be there, at that time – the golden age..."). And his level-headed but engaging approach to this most otherworldly of subjects clearly inspired a generation of budding fortune tellers, whose fascination with the likes of "Gef, the Talking Mongoose" (whose clawed paws I was convinced would one day poke through the cracks in my own bedroom ceiling, as the book's alarming illustration suggested) has come to shape our adult pastimes and professions.

The 2019 reissue campaign began, curiously, in Finland, where – back in the 1970s – the Usborne *Haunted Houses*, *Mysterious Powers* and *Vampires* books had been licensed to publishers Tammi and collected under the title *Noidan Käsikirja*. A Facebook group formed by Finnish fans gained almost 3,000 members, and led to an August 2018 reprint that sold out within a week; with the country's latest sales figures now surpassing 18,000. Meanwhile, back in Britain, film director Ashley Thorpe and his Nuclear Films team contacted Usborne to request an interview with Chris, citing the book as a major influence on their animated feature *Borley Rectory* (see p63). They found themselves in touch with Usborne marketing director Anna Howorth, herself a fan of the book, who was inspired enough to

set up an online petition, hoping to convince the publishers that a UK reissue was a viable proposition. 1,000 signatories later, and with a promise in the bag from *League of Gentlemen*, *Inside No. 9*, and, indeed, *Borley Rectory* star Reece Shearsmith to write a new foreword, the deal was sealed.

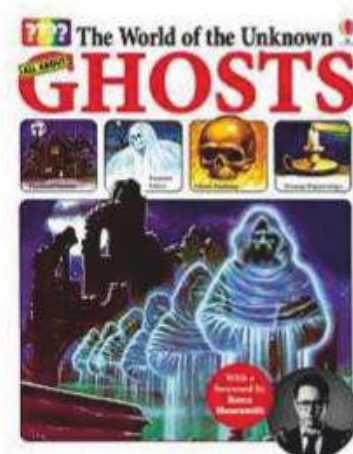
"Again, amazement and thrill!" grins Chris, when I ask for his reaction, and he gushes with enthusiasm as I press him on the subject of the film. Although the infamously spook-plagued rectory itself is never mentioned by name in the book (there were, apparently, potential legal issues at the time), it clearly provided the inspiration for the "Haunted House" double page spread, detailing the trademark signs of a textbook ghost infestation ("an old skull screams whenever it is moved from the house"; "a bloodstain on the floor cannot be removed"), and Chris has been a willing participant in the film's bonus features, with director Ashley Thorpe making a distinct impression on him. "A lovely guy from Exeter," muses Chris, "who had in his school library a copy of the book that he took out regularly, and it lasted and stayed with him. He crowdfunded the various stages of the film, and part of the story that he told was his joy at taking a book that inspired him, and finally realising it in this wonderful animated film. And what he hadn't expected was people then to say 'Oh, I remember that book!'"

"We've broken down the walls of resistance to blowing off the dust from books that are 20 years out of date, and reissuing them like this. We've never had a revolt from below..."

Chris retired from full-time writing in the

late 1990s, but is still clearly fizzing with energy and inspiration. In the two hours that we spend together, surrounded by the effervescent hubbub of the market stalls, he brims with ideas, anecdotes, thoughts and opinions: they tumble out of him, joyously, in a ceaselessly entertaining flood. "Two hundred years from now, people will be doing books like this about the ghosts of Old Spitalfields Market, and you and I will be sitting here," he grins. "We are the hauntings of the future..."

As we part, and I begin the slow amble back to Liverpool Street station to return the original *Ghosts* book to Usborne's bustling Farringdon offices, I feel the hairs on the back of my neck prickle. I whip around fast, but there is, of course, nothing there. But thanks to Chris, I've still got the feeling.



The reissued edition of *The World of the Unknown: Ghosts* is available now from Usborne Publishing. Thanks to Chris Maynard, to Anna Howorth and

Emma Baxter from Usborne, and to Tamsin Rosewell from Kenilworth Books.

BOB FISCHER is the writer of FT's *Haunted Generation* column, and a radio presenter for BBC Tees. He tweets @bob\_fischer, and blogs at [hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://hauntedgeneration.co.uk)



# THE HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND

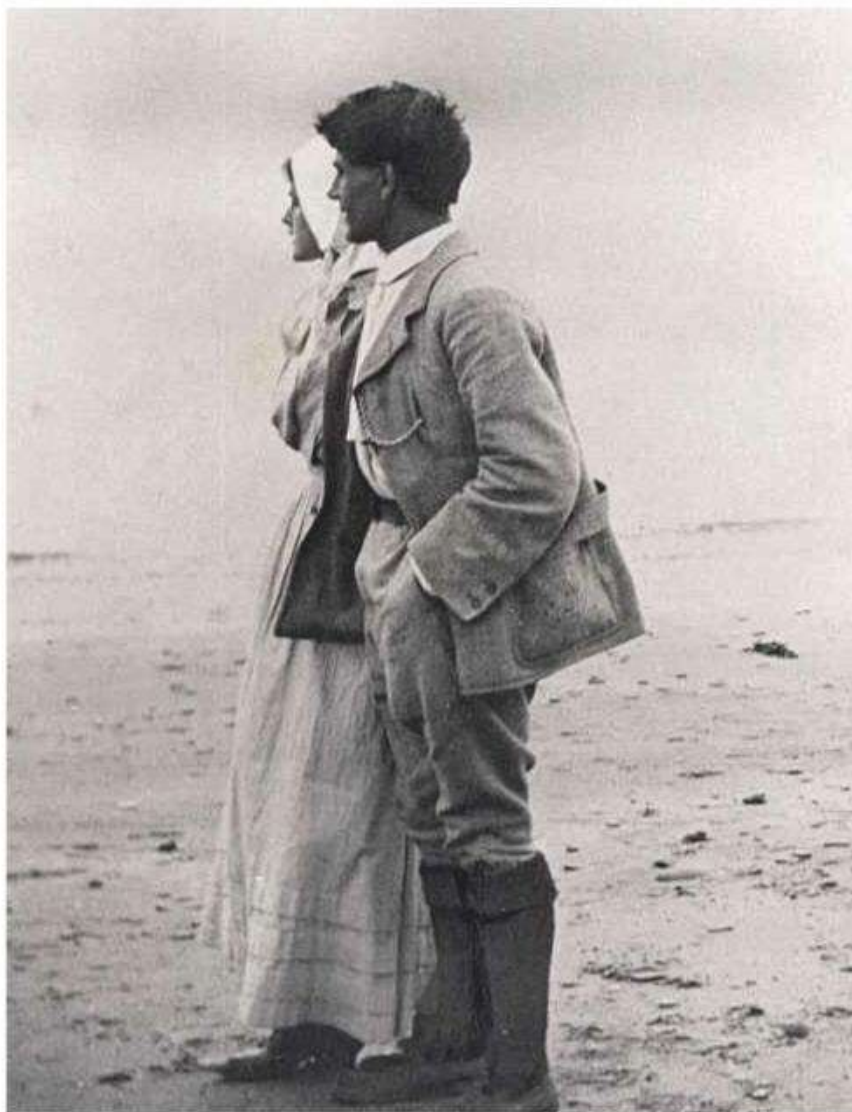
## IN SEARCH OF WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

In his new book, **EDWARD PARNELL** goes in search of the ‘sequestered places’ of the British Isles and explores how these haunted landscapes shaped a kaleidoscopic spectrum of literature and cinema. Here, he arrives in Cardiganshire to look for the house in which the neglected master of weird fiction William Hope Hodgson wrote one of his greatest works.

**T**he shore he used to look out across, over which he would sometimes walk, shimmers through the glass. Perhaps this was even the room in which he wrote – it’s said he preferred to work at night – though I’d hazard that would have been up on the third floor. In the picture I have seen of him on Borth beach, he stands in the foreground, this side of his bonnet-clad favourite sister, Lissie, almost as if they are joined at the shoulder. He is looking into the distance, out to sea, his mouth slightly agape in a smirk, his hands in his pockets. He is dark haired and tanned, and at five foot four and a half (164cm) is only just taller than her, but undoubtedly he is handsome; by all accounts he was a hit with the young women of the village.

Bookcases fill two walls of the room, a mixture of titles stretching from floor to ceiling. A rugby match is playing out silently on the television that stands on a low occasional table in front of the window.

I had doubted whether I would be able to find this place: the Welsh house in which one of the greatest English writers of weird fiction wrote a significant amount of his work, including my favourite of his four novels, *The House on the Borderland*. Like many details about this author’s life, the exact timing of when and where he worked on each of his books is subject to debate, though it seems he was living here during the book’s completion and publication. This much we know, because he signs and dates his name below the introduction to *The House on the Borderland*’s mysterious manuscript: William Hope



**LEFT:** William Hope Hodgson and his sister Lissie on the beach at Borth.  
**FACING PAGE:** The view from Glaneifion.

the likeable coastal resort of Borth, a few miles north of Aberystwyth. After squeezing my car into one of the few available spaces, conveniently next to a pleasant-looking café, I take advantage of the fine spring weather and buy an ice cream. I expect the mission I’ve given myself – to see if I can find William Hope Hodgson’s house – will prove fruitless, as in the century that has passed I’m sure names are bound to have changed. I do know, however, that the Hodgsons’ accommodation had its back to the sea, so I concentrate on that side.

I’ve just started into my ice cream and crossed the road and there, directly in front of me, it is – a quest that has taken less than a minute. An attractive three-storey villa, Glaneifion has a claret-coloured door and windows. Its dark exterior has a mottled appearance, as if capillaries flow beneath its surface. This is where Hodgson lived on and off between 1904 and the end of 1910, and where in earlier summers his family holidayed.

I stare at the building and wonder if I should knock, though as I’m still scoffing my ice cream, I figure I’ll take a walk first. A passageway bisects the terrace a few doors down and I emerge from shadow onto the upper beach. I’m not sure whether I will be able to work out which is Glaneifion from this new angle, but it’s instantly obvious. Four figures sit at the boundary of its garden, overlooking the glinting sea; I decide to wander to the shoreline before accosting them.

*He is looking into the distance, out to sea, his mouth slightly agape*

Hodgson ‘Glaneifion’, Borth, Cardiganshire, December 17, 1907.

I had arrived sometime after lunch in









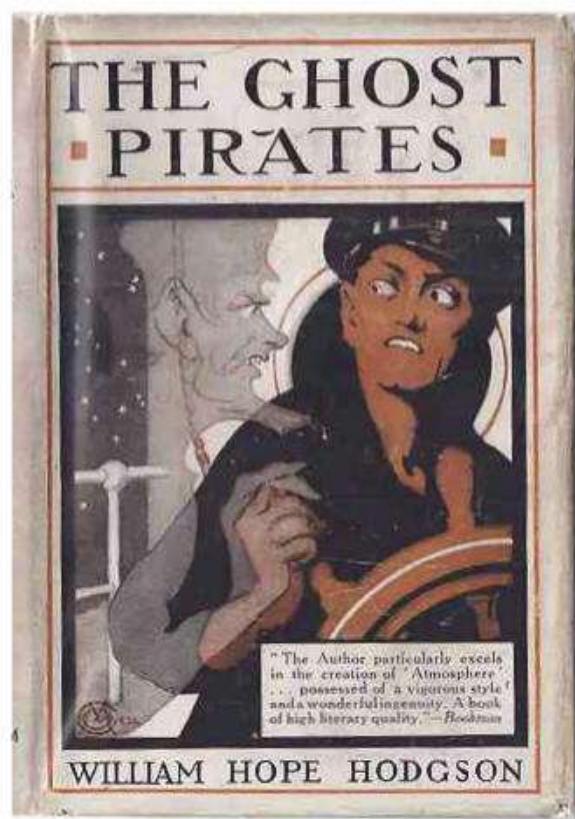
**ABOVE LEFT:** Glaneifion, the house in Borth, Cardiganshire, where Hodgson lived between 1904 and 1910 and did a significant amount of his literary work. **ABOVE RIGHT:** William Hope Hodgson. **BELOW:** A 1922 edition of Hodgson's *The Ghost Pirates*, a novel of maritime horror first published in 1907.

### A WANDERING LIFE

William Hope Hodgson was born in November 1877 in the Essex village of Blackmore End, a few miles north of Braintree. His father, the Reverend Samuel Hodgson, was an unorthodox character prone to disagreements with his superiors, which led to him being posted to various disparate parishes around the country. William – known to his family as Hope, to distinguish him from his well-to-do tailor grandfather – was the second of 12 children, three of whom were to perish before reaching the age of two.

The young Hope showed an aversion to organised religion, though a spiritual element is present in his second novel *The House on the Borderland* (published in 1908), and his final full-length work *The Night Land* from four years later. The earlier book is ostensibly set around an otherworldly mansion located “some 40 miles distant” from Ardrahan on the west coast of Ireland’s County Galway, the place where the Reverend Hodgson was exiled as a missionary in 1887. There he was charged with converting the local Catholics to Protestantism, an exercise doomed to failure as the resident population resented the presence of an Anglican English family in the Old Rectory, out of sight and apart from the village like the titular house of the novel, down a lengthy drive encased by vast orchards. These same expansive

*Houdini claimed the irons supplied by Hodgson were tampered with*



surroundings, in which the unruly Hope once spent several days stuck up a tree he had climbed – he was fed and sustained by the family’s servants before he finally descended – were stripped of their fruit by the villagers as tensions between the two strands of Christianity came to a head, resulting in the Hodgsons’ return to England.

There, in 1890, they settled in the northern industrial heartland of Blackburn. Late the following year, Hope, aged 13, ran away properly after a ratcheting up of the friction between father and son, signing on for a four-year apprenticeship as a cabin boy in the Mercantile Navy, which paved the way for a further stint of similar length as a seaman. By the time Hope came back from sea in 1898 – a spell that was to have a profound influence on his first works of weird fiction – his father was gone, a victim at the age of 46 of cancer of the throat. This, it has been speculated – though the claim sounds spurious to me – resulted from the tight dog collars the Reverend Hodgson was forced to wear. His death plunged the family into several years of financial hardship alleviated only by the passing of Hope’s wealthy grandfather and namesake.

After his return to Blackburn, Hope opened ‘WH Hodgson’s School of Physical Culture’ during the second half of 1899. His early gymnasium apparently proved popular with the local police force, running for the



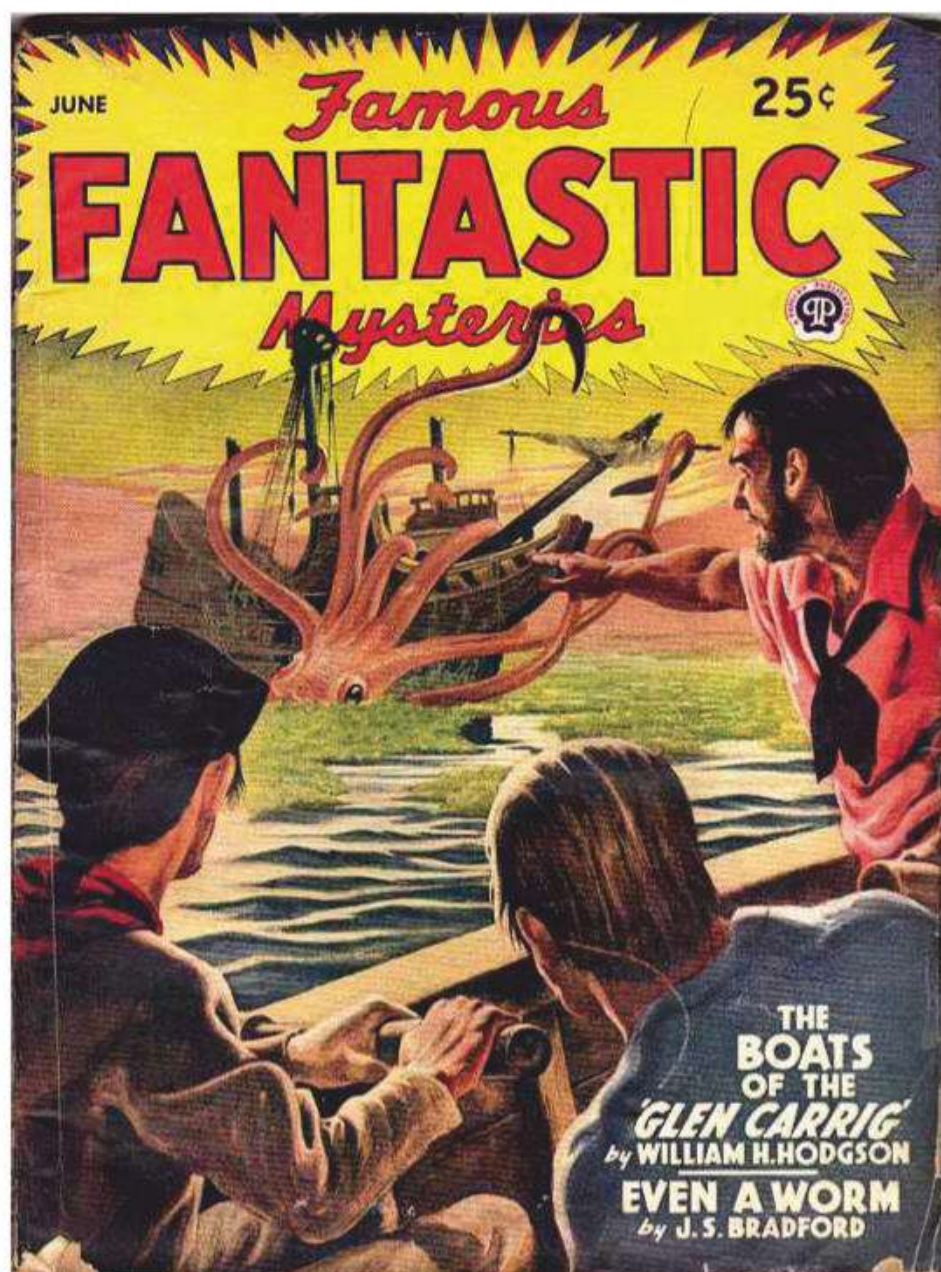
next few years and perhaps right up until he moved to Borth in 1904. Hodgson also wrote various articles for national magazines on 'scientific exercises'. In October 1902 he was involved in an extraordinary incident in the Lancashire town's history, when the American escapologist (and later debunker of fraudulent mediums) Harry Houdini visited: "Mr WH Hodgson, principal of the Blackburn School of Physical Culture, took up the challenge issued by Houdini, the 'Handcuff King' who engaged to forfeit £25 to the infirmary if he failed to free himself from any irons placed upon him."

Far from delivering good publicity for Hodgson's gym, the episode proved shambolic. Houdini struggled for over three-quarters of an hour to loosen himself from irons supplied by Hodgson that the showman claimed had been tampered with. Hodgson left the theatre before the end of the performance, having being ordered home by a police sergeant who was fearful that a dangerous public disturbance might result. Addressing the audience when he finally freed himself, Houdini stated that he had "never been so brutally treated".

## SEA TERRORS

I perch on the seaward side of the new defences that have allowed this fragile stretch of coastline to evade the worst ravage of the waves for the past six years – enormous boulders shipped in from Norway that already are dotted with barnacles. I watch as a herring gull picks lethargically at the gouged-out shell of a crab near the water.

A light turquoise post that rises 15 feet from the sand is plastered up to its high-tide mark with seaweed and a skin of encrusted shells, reminding me of Hodgson's sea-based strange fiction. In addition to various short stories he also wrote two novels of maritime horror. His first book, *The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, published in 1904, is an adventure in which the weed-choked Sargasso Sea harbours all sorts of marine monstrosities, giant crabs, abandoned hulks, and peculiar islands; *The Ghost Pirates*, which came out five years later, features supernatural (perhaps even inter-dimensional) beings that haunt the high seas, and is to my mind the superior work as it manages to retain its ominous, claustrophobic atmosphere throughout. I first read many of these tales on a cruise through Scottish waters, periodically lifting my eyes from the pages to scan for whales, which added to the



LEFT: Hope Hodgson's *The Boats of the "Glen Carrig"* appears in an American pulp magazine in 1945.

powerful work about infection and altered bodily states. The moment the fiancée discovers the beginnings of the thing that will consume her is horrifying and resonant: "It was on the thumb of her right hand that the growth first showed. It was only a small circular spot, much like a little grey mole. My God! how the fear leapt to my heart when she showed me the place."

## GLANEIFION

I crunch up the shingle to the back of Glaneifion, where now just three people – a middle-aged couple and a woman – are enjoying the spring sunshine at the boundary of beach and garden. "Sorry to disturb you," I ask, "I was wondering if you knew whether an Edwardian writer used to live in this house..."

"Do you mean William Hope Hodgson?" the woman replies, and I nod, surprised. "My husband's who you want to speak with. He's watching the

rugby at the minute. Hang on. I'll go see."

She re-emerges with her husband, a man I'd guess is in his early 60s, with shoulder-length, silvery-grey hair and thick white eyebrows. He greets me with a smile and asks me to follow him inside.

"I'm Anthony," he says, and as we climb the stairs I thank him, apologising for disturbing his rugby viewing.

"Don't worry, it isn't much of a match."

I explain what I'm doing and Anthony wonders whether I have all of Hodgson's books – in the brief period before my entrance he's already gathered a collection of paperbacks in a pile on the floor of the lounge. He gestures to the sofa and then disappears to fetch more ephemera. And I am sitting alone in this room overlooking the beach and it's so exciting and unexpected to be here that I half expect time to start cascading forwards and back as it does in *The House on the Borderland*.

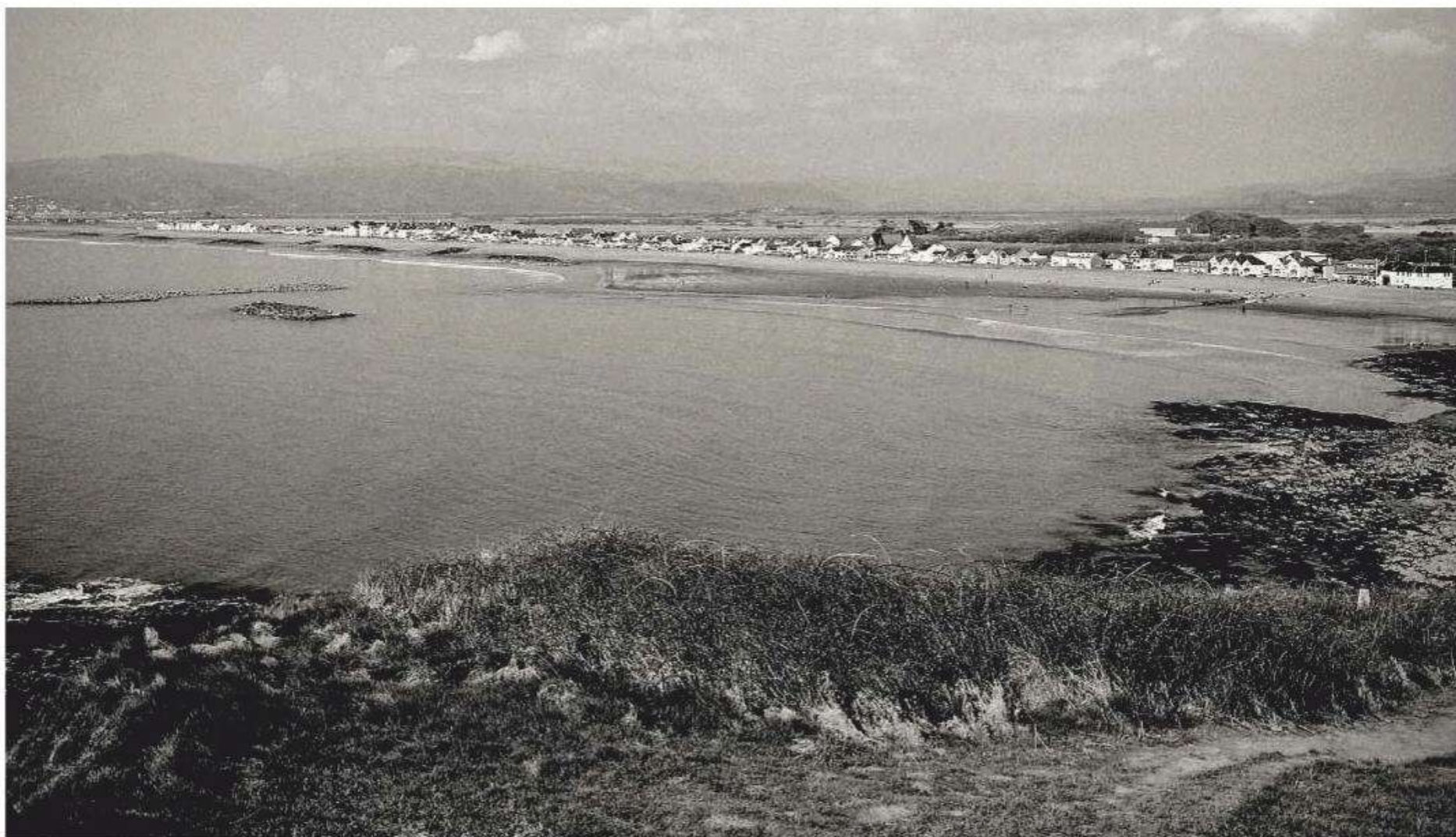
My host returns with various items of correspondence, including from R Alain Everts, an American who compiled one of the few biographical pieces on Hodgson. There are also the transcribed reminiscences of a neighbour of Hope's mother and sister from when they relocated a mile inland to their newly built hillside residence called Lisswood – Hope visited the pair there when he was on leave from the war. Anthony tells me that despite being from Borth, he hadn't heard of

experience of reading about Hodgson's grotesque krakens – like Melville and Conrad before him, he drew on his own first-hand nautical knowledge to confer authenticity upon his writing.

Hodgson's finest short sea-set tale of the fantastic, 'The Voice in the Night', was published in the November 1907 edition of the *Blue Book Magazine*. In it, the lone sailor awake on the deck of a fishing schooner "becalmed in the Northern Pacific" is shocked by a voice that drifts upwards out of the blackness. The occupant of the unseen rowing boat, who claims to be an old man, insists that George and his now-alert crewman stop shining the beam of their lamp out onto the waters. He asks, in "a voice curiously throaty and inhuman", for food to take to his starving female companion, who is waiting on a nearby island. The two sailors float a box of provisions to him, which the old man gratefully receives. Later, still under the cover of darkness, the speaker returns alongside, and tells the men the story of how, some four months previous, he and his fiancée – he is not, it transpires, old – were abandoned by the crew of their doomed vessel the *Albatross*, before they managed to construct a raft and escape. Days afterwards the pair found a deceptive haven in a lagoon housing a ship shrouded in a "grey, lichenous fungus" that also covered the entire island.

'The Voice in the Night' is an intense,





ABOVE: A view over Borth. BELOW: Lieutenant William Hope Hodgson of the Royal Field Artillery, photographed some time during World War I. FACING PAGE: The Arkham House edition of *The House on the Borderland* published by August Derleth in 1946.

Hodgson when he moved back to the village 22 years ago. But afterwards people would keep mentioning that they were in the house where William Hope Hodgson used to live, and although Anthony wasn't a particular fan of horror or science fiction he searched out and bought all of his books. Since then, a few waifs and strays like me have swept up unannounced, including, once, two Americans. Probably because of the posthumous praise accorded to Hodgson by HP Lovecraft, and later, August Derleth, who reissued his works under his Arkham House imprint, Hodgson enjoys a much higher profile in the States than in his native Britain.

Anthony asks if I'm familiar with the region, and I admit I'm not. Just behind the village there's a flat amphitheatre-like area of bog, not unlike the topography of 'the Plain' that features so strikingly in *The House on the Borderland*. After a pint or two in the pub, Anthony says, talk sometimes turns to whether it was Hodgson's inspiration for his novel's enigmatic arena. And in February 2014 this wild expanse at the back of Borth was temporarily transformed into a Hodgsonesque vision of hell, when a peat fire engulfed the land.

### COSMIC HORROR

The strangeness of *The House on the Borderland* has stayed with me ever since I first read it a few years ago, and I still can't quite believe I'm in the place where Hodgson signed off its introduction posing

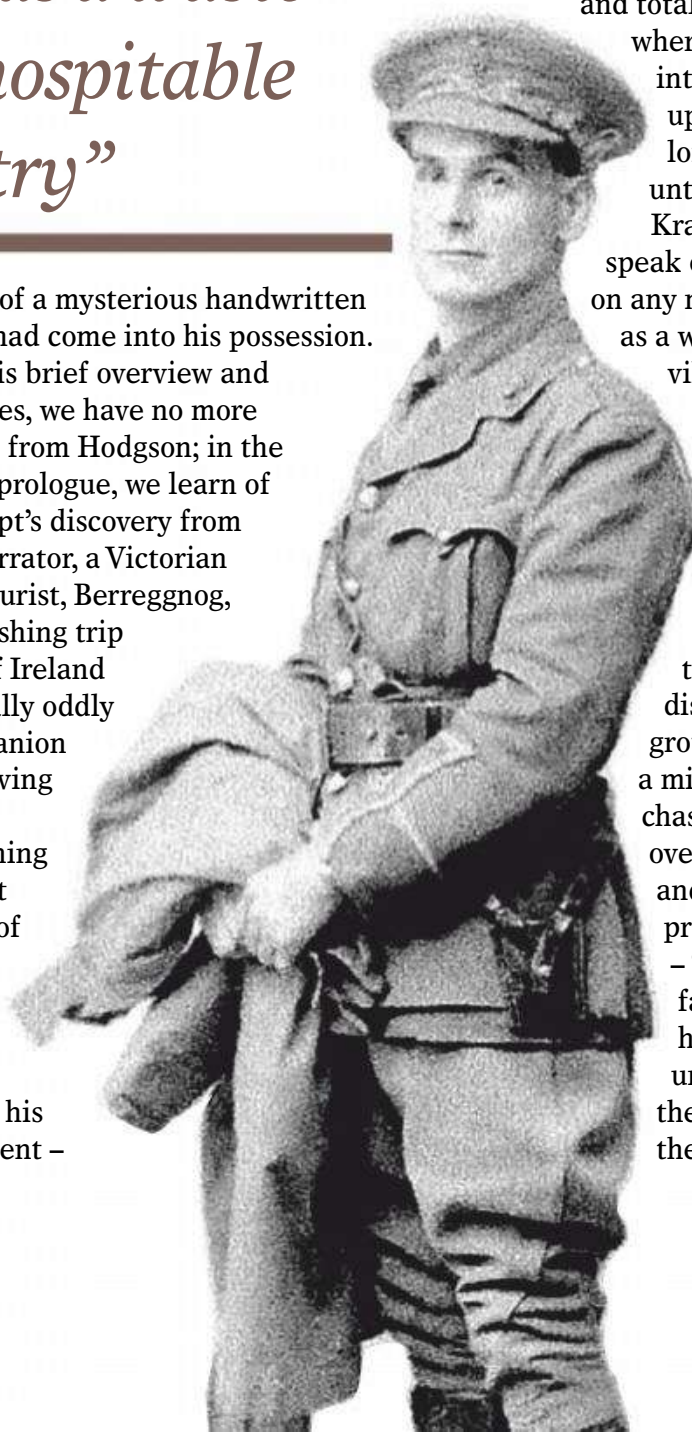
*"Far around there spreads a waste of inhospitable country"*

as the editor of a mysterious handwritten journal that had come into his possession. Apart from his brief overview and a few footnotes, we have no more interventions from Hodgson; in the atmospheric prologue, we learn of the manuscript's discovery from our initial narrator, a Victorian gentleman tourist, Berreggnog, who is on a fishing trip to the west of Ireland with his equally oddly named companion Tonnison. Having arrived the previous evening at the nearest train station of Ardahan – the Galway village to which Hodgson and his family were sent –

the two men travel all of the next day, some 40 miles over rugged tracks, before they reach the fictional hamlet of Kraithen.

"Far around there spreads a waste of bleak and totally inhospitable country; where, here and there at great intervals, one may come upon the ruins of some long desolate cottage – unthatched and stark."

Kraithen, where the locals speak only Gaelic, is not depicted on any maps, which should serve as a warning. Neither is the village's fast-flowing river, which Tonnison discovered on a walking tour the previous year, noting that it looked to offer decent fishing for a future angling holiday. Exploring downstream, the two men find that its waters disappear abruptly into the ground, emerging more than a mile away in a spray-filled chasm concealed in a long-overgrown area of gardens and orchards. An arm of rock projects above this abyss – 'the Pit' – holding the faintest traces of an ancient house, in which Tonnison uncovers the manuscript. As the pair explore the domain they hear a foreboding





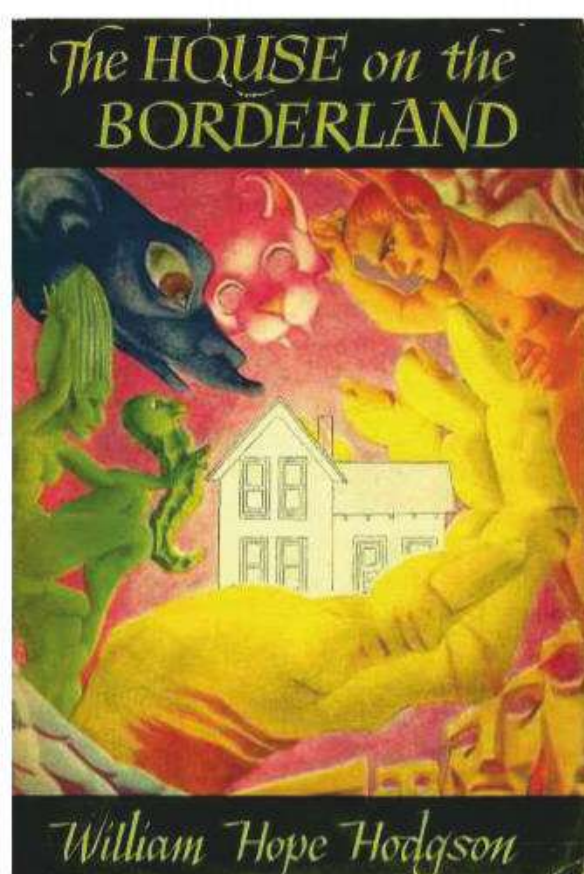
wailing from among the crowded fruit trees, causing them to hurry back to their camp; they vow never to return to the malevolent vicinity. Over supper in their tent Berreggnog reads aloud from the dusty, part-illegible book, and it is this narrative that fills the remainder of the novel's pages, save for a short concluding chapter.

"I am an old man. I live here in this ancient house, surrounded by huge, unkempt gardens." Thus begins *The House on the Borderland* proper, as the story of what befell the mysterious, nameless 'Recluse' and his sister, some 70 years or so previous, is revealed. It's a novel of two distinct halves: the first, in which the man's isolated house – said by the local country people to have been built by the Devil – is held under siege by otherworldly humanoid 'Swine-creatures'; and the second, a visionary astral journey through the outer reaches of the cosmos to a parallel dwelling on the borderland, set among a vast, alien amphitheatre-like plain overlooked by madness-inducing mountains that swarm with colossal demonic forms. During this epoch-traversing vision the hands of the clock in the Recluse's study hurry forwards until they are a blur – a scene reminiscent of HG Wells's *The Time Machine*, a book Hodgson himself owned.

We get hints too within the fragmented manuscript of the Recluse's semi-spiritual, but all-too-abrupt reconciliation with his dead lover in the so-called 'Sea of Sleep'. This theme is explored further in Hodgson's final novel *The Night Land*, a kind of heroic quest of redemptive love set on a dying Earth peopled with vicious entities that assail the last human survivors.

In some ways *The House on the Borderland* is an unbalanced novel, and yet it works wonderfully. I prefer its beguiling first half – the swine-creatures, the apocalyptic atmosphere of the house straddling two planes, the devastatingly sad fate of the Recluse's dog Pepper – but the uncanniness of the imagined second-act journey to the outer reaches of time and the Universe, and the seeming chaos and decrepitude at the heart of existence, is the vital ingredient that elevates the work into a classic of cosmic horror.

As to what it all means, Hodgson's own introduction leaves that up to the individual reader, which is just as well, given there are so many possible interpretations, so many unanswered questions: what, for instance, is the relationship between the desolate dwelling and its twin on the plain at the periphery of the Universe? Why is the Recluse's sister so apparently insensible to what's taking place around her – is there a *Cabinet of Dr Caligari*-esque explanation that all the happenings are merely the construct of an unhinged man? And if not this, then why are the Recluse and his sister impervious to the ravages of time while his dog is not? Even if Hodgson's editorial intro is something of a cop-out, it's a clever



one: "Of the simple, stiffly given account of weird and extraordinary matters, I will say little. It lies before you. The inner story must be uncovered, personally, by each reader, according to ability and desire."

The novel's end comes with a brutal suddenness, as we read the Recluse's tailed-off final words. In a fate like that which befalls the island-marooned couple from 'The Voice in the Night' we learn that a 'foul growth' has also come to affect the Recluse, though in his case it began with a growing, other-dimensional speck of phosphorescence on his wrist, rather than rampant fungal spores. I can't help wondering whether the spreading cancer on his father's throat played into these fearful depictions of contagion.

### NIGHT LAND

Despite the modern-day critical acclaim afforded *The House on the Borderland*, and the earlier praise heaped upon his work by commentators as diverse as Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Bernard Shaw and CS Lewis, Hodgson's four novels did not sell well. The commercial failure of the book he considered his masterpiece, *The Night Land*, led him to abandon the genre, though not before his publisher Eveleigh Nash brought together the six John Silence-like occult detective tales he'd written for magazines in the excellent *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder*.

Hodgson turned to the ocean again for his last stories, now stripped of the supernatural. These were collected, in 1917, as *Captain Gault*. Hodgson also delivered lectures about the maritime life to paying audiences as a way to supplement his meagre writer's income – he was an outstanding early amateur photographer and used the images he had taken during his far-flung travels in the 1890s to illustrate his talks. Some were sold at the time to periodicals and others,

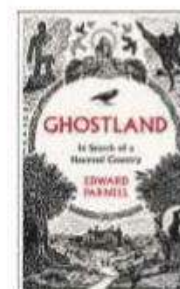
after his death, to the Meteorological Office, including shots of phenomena rarely before captured at sea, such as cyclones, leviathanic waves, fork lightning and the aurora borealis.

Having relocated to London from Borth a couple of years earlier – a move he hoped would ignite his career as an author – in February 1913, aged 35, Hodgson married Bessie Farnworth, a girl he'd known from school in Blackburn, and who now worked on a women's magazine in the capital. Shortly afterwards, the newlyweds settled in the South of France on the Côte d'Azur, where Hodgson continued to plug away at his writing.

When war was declared the couple returned to England. Rather than go back to sea, Hodgson was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery. As well as letters and articles about French spies, Hodgson also sent home patriotic poetry. He recovered from a serious head injury suffered after being thrown from his horse in June 1916 and rejoined hostilities on the Western Front. Events might have turned out differently if Hodgson had not been so stoic – indeed, just a week before his death he was briefly hospitalised once again after a heavy German attack. Instead, he volunteered as a Forward Observer (FO), the precarious role responsible for directing artillery fire onto a target; bravery was nothing new for Hodgson, as in 1898 he had been awarded a Royal Humane Society medal for diving into shark-encircled waters off New Zealand to rescue a fellow seaman.

Having managed to survive in his hazardous FO duties until April 1918, Hodgson's good fortune finally expired. A direct hit from a German shell on the 19th of the month, near the village of Kemmel in the borderlands of Belgium, transformed him into fragmentary pieces. His remains were said to be unidentifiable, though a helmet bearing the name Lt. W Hope Hodgson was retrieved by French soldiers.

"If I live and come somehow out of this (and certainly, please God, I shall and hope to)," he had earlier written home, graphically describing the otherworldly desolation and destruction of Flanders, "what a book I shall write."



This article is an edited extract from *Ghostland: In Search of a Haunted Country* by Edward Parnell, published by William Collins, RRP £16.99.

◆ EDWARD PARNELL is a Norfolk-based writer whose first book, *The Listener*, won the 2014 Rethink New Novels Prize. He has also written numerous natural history and conservation-related articles for magazines and newspapers.



# LIGHTNING OR LEGENDRY?

## THE CHASE VAULT MOVING COFFIN MYSTERY REVISITED

The moving coffins of Barbados have been a staple subject of books on the unexplained for over a century, and yet no one has so far provided a wholly satisfactory solution to the mystery. **BENJAMIN RADFORD** argues that we might have been looking in the wrong place...

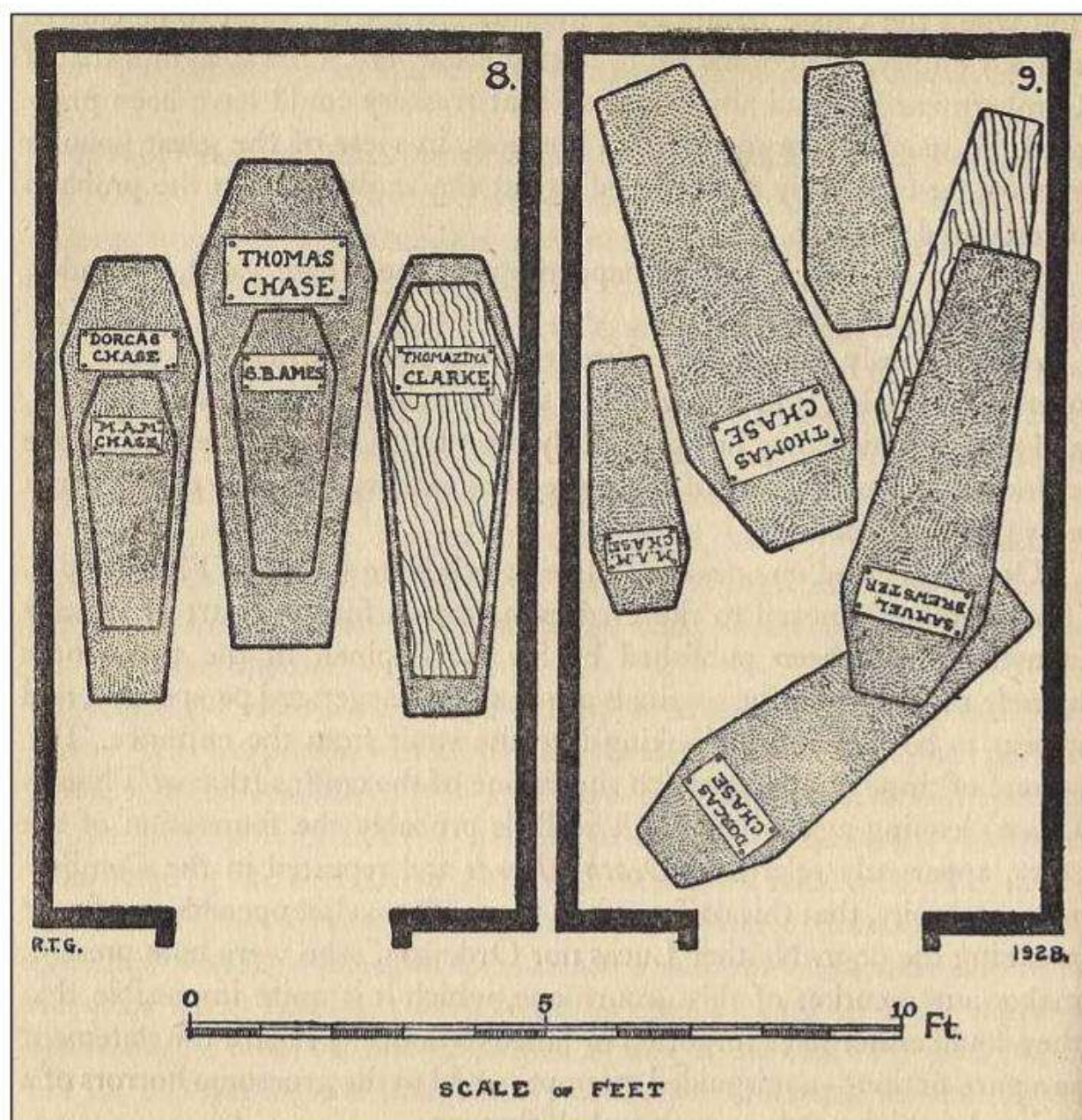
The story of the restless coffins in a Barbadian burial vault (see **FT133:40-44, 347:26**) was one of the two earliest “unexplained mysteries” that caught my attention as a teenager (the other being the 1855 Devil’s Footprints case in England). I forget exactly where I read it – probably a *Reader’s Digest* book of mysteries or another of its ilk, which I voraciously consumed at the time – but I distinctly recall poring over the story and getting chills imagining what a ghost or curse would do to me if I crossed it. I took comfort in the fact that Barbados was far, far away, separated from me by at least one sea, and whatever evil possessed the coffins was unlikely to pursue me.

As the years passed the story faded, replaced by newer and more exciting reports of alien abductions, chupacabras, crop circles, and other forteen high weirdness. It was a stale, stuffy sort of distant mystery locked in time – the early 1800s – though superficially and inevitably rehashed in later books on the unexplained. Despite a handful of articles on the story, there was nothing new and little if any follow-up. The coffins were long gone, and nothing notable had apparently happened since. I never bothered to look into the mystery, partly because the West Indies remained just as far away, and partly because there seemed little to profitably investigate at this remove.

Nevertheless, I’ve since become much more familiar with folklore and visited the Chase Vault twice over the past few years, rather improbably discovering fresh angles on the stale old tale. I’d always assumed that the musty mystery, calcifying for two centuries in the sweltering Caribbean sun, would always remain unsolved. I no longer believe that to be the case.

### THE CHASE VAULT STORY

There are several versions of the famous story (more on that later), but the basic one goes something like this, taken from *The History of Barbados* (1848), by Sir Robert Schomburgk:



*“The coffins were found scattered about, and one of the largest thrown on its side...”*

ABOVE: An illustration showing the coffins in their original positions and how they were found when the vault was opened; taken from Rupert T Gould’s *Oddities*, 1928.

“A strange occurrence took place in the adjacent churchyard, the natural cause of which has never been explained. On two occasions, when the death of a member of the family of the late Colonel Chase had rendered it necessary to open the family vault, it was found that the coffins had been removed from their places, and as no signs





BENJAMIN RADFORD

**ABOVE:** The Chase Vault, Barbados. **BELOW:** Soldier, traveller and author James Edward Alexander, whose 1833 book *Transatlantic Sketches* contains what appears to be the earliest published account of the moving coffins of Barbados.

were observed that the vault had been opened without the knowledge of the family, it excited great astonishment. Before the vault was walled up again, the coffins were restored to their original position. Shortly afterwards it was requisite to open the vault again for the admission of a member of the family, when the coffins were found to have been displaced as on the former occasion; the family now became anxious to ascertain the truth, and particular pains were taken in securing the wall, and fine sand was thrown over the floor of the vault, so that, if a person should enter it from any other part than the usual entrance, marks might be left behind. [Then-governor] Lord Combermere was residing in 1820 in the neighbourhood of the church, and having been told of this mysterious circumstance, he made unexpectedly an application to the Rector to have the vault re-opened, when to the astonishment of all present, the coffins, to the number of five or six, were found scattered about, and one of the largest thrown on its side across the passage, so that, had the door not opened outwards, an entrance could not have been effected except by removing the slab on the top, which is of immense weight. The private marks made on the previous occasion were undisturbed, and as this was the fourth occurrence of a similar disturbance without the cause being explained, the family



resolved on removing the bodies from the vault, and some of them were interred in the parish churchyard. The vault is now empty, and the Rector has since ordered it to be walled up. One of the gentlemen who accompanied Lord Combermere took a sketch of the position in which the coffins were found, copies of which are still extant in the island”<sup>1</sup>.

The earliest published version of the story seems to date to an unsourced passage in J Alexander’s 1833 book *Transatlantic Sketches*. Consulting it and other sources we can add

a few more names, dates, and details to this outline: The vault at Christ Church Parish Church in Oistins was originally built for another family, the Elliots, but purchased in 1807 by Colonel Thomas Chase, who buried his infant daughter Mary there in February of the following year. In 1812, the vault was again opened to accept a second daughter, Dorcas (a rumoured suicide), and the coffins found to be in disarray. Colonel Chase himself was interred there later that same year – dying, it is said, either by his own hand or killed by slaves for his brutality. The vault was opened twice in 1816 and again in 1820 to receive a Thomasina Clark, again with the same baffling results. It was this last opening that allegedly drew Lord Combermere to investigate, an event to which Nathan Lucas, a local chief justice, claimed to have been a first-hand eyewitness.

The story has many iterations, including accounts attributed to Lord Combermere, Nathan Lucas, Reverend Thomas Orderson, and others; versions written by Robert Reece, Sir Algernon Aspinall, K Redding (author of a 1860 pamphlet titled *Death Deeds*) and others. I will spare readers a full accounting of them here, but reasonably comprehensive reviews can be found in works by: Andrew Lang (‘Death’s Deeds: A Bi-Located Story’, *Folk-Lore*, 31 Dec 1907), Brian Ridout (2018), and Rupert T Gould in *Oddities* (1928).



There is no agreement on the order of interments, nor even on how many coffins the vault eventually held. Details aside, the key conclusion is that the versions are in many ways contradictory and much of the ‘credible’ information fabricated or simply false. As Joe Nickell notes: “Although Lucas avows he was an eyewitness to the last opening, he is forced to rely on the Rev. Thomas H Orderson’s account of the earlier incidents and Orderson himself (if several ‘authentic’ accounts allegedly signed by him can be believed) never told the story quite the same way twice.”<sup>2</sup> Lucas’s original report – considered among the most reliable and detailed account of the events – has never been found (if it existed at all), and was merely *attributed to him* by an anonymous source. Numerous significant discrepancies between the stories have been noted by many researchers.

Brian Ridout in particular does a masterful job of comparing versions and tracing fabrications, noting for example that *Death Deeds* (1860) “is important because it is extravagantly exaggerated and has influenced much that has been written subsequently”. He concludes: “Most of the descriptive comments made about the vault in published accounts are more or less incorrect or unhelpful. The *Death Deeds* portrayal is completely imaginary.”<sup>3</sup> There are several drawings of how the coffins were found when the vault was opened, adding apparent veracity to the stories, but they are contradictory and wildly inaccurate as to scale and other factors.

With this background in mind, I recently visited Barbados to investigate what I could, both in terms of folklore and to evaluate a novel explanation by Ridout recently proposed in the *Journal of the Society for*

*Psychical Research*. I interviewed tour guide CJ Hinds in Bridgetown, Barbados, as he drove us to the Christ Church cemetery to see the infamous vault. “It’s a true story, and it’s not the first time something like that has happened in Barbados,” he said (more on that later). We discussed the most common explanations along the way.

### NATURAL EXPLANATIONS

The most obvious explanation is that one or more unknown people entered the vault and disturbed the coffins. There would however be no motivation; the coffins were unopened, and even had they been opened, there was nothing of value contained within. Furthermore there was no evidence of any breach of the underground vault, no breaking of seals or traces on the ground. Moving the entrance slab would have been a difficult task in itself, likely requiring a half-dozen people, not to mention lifting and moving heavy, body-filled lead-lined coffins within a very tight space. And all of this would have been done under cover of night without artificial light to avoid detection, on multiple occasions over the course of eight years.

Another superficially obvious explanation for the vault disturbance is some sort of (apparently very localised) earthquake

that somehow affected the vault. While earthquakes do occur in Barbados, they are rare, minor, and would likely have been noted as being linked to the (repeated) coffin disturbances.

Another, somewhat more likely, natural explanation is that the vault became flooded and the coffins, despite being lead-lined and heavy, were nevertheless buoyant enough to have floated into such disarray. This theory was advanced from at least the 1860s, with its advocates noting that the Caribbean island is often battered by drenching hurricanes.

The two possible sources would be storm water or ground water, though both are equally improbable. It’s not obvious from photographs, but the vault and the Christ Church cemetery are near the top of a hill, not in a valley, and rain would run off in all directions long before filling the vault. During an especially sustained heavy rain a few inches of water might appear in the vault, but it would likely drain out soon thereafter, as the terrain is mostly porous coral limestone.<sup>4</sup>

As for groundwater, Joe Nickell quotes the Chief Engineer of the Waterworks Department of Barbados, who explains: “For flooding to be a real possibility, the vault would have to be no more than a few feet above sea level... If the vault were located more than 10ft [3m] above sea level, then flooding could not have been the cause.” In any event, one would expect that burial vaults at lower elevations on the island (such as those in Saint Philip, Saint Lucy, and Saint Michael parishes) would be routinely flooded, and this phenomenon well known to undertakers across Barbados. Furthermore, this theory would not explain the extensive displacement of the coffins; given their size and number and the very small space they

*Another natural explanation is that the vault became flooded*



ABOVE: A rear view of the Chase Vault.



occupied (not to mention the 2m- (6.5ft) high curved ceiling preventing significant shifting on the Z-axis) it's far more likely that the coffins would float and then resettle in more or less the same positions.

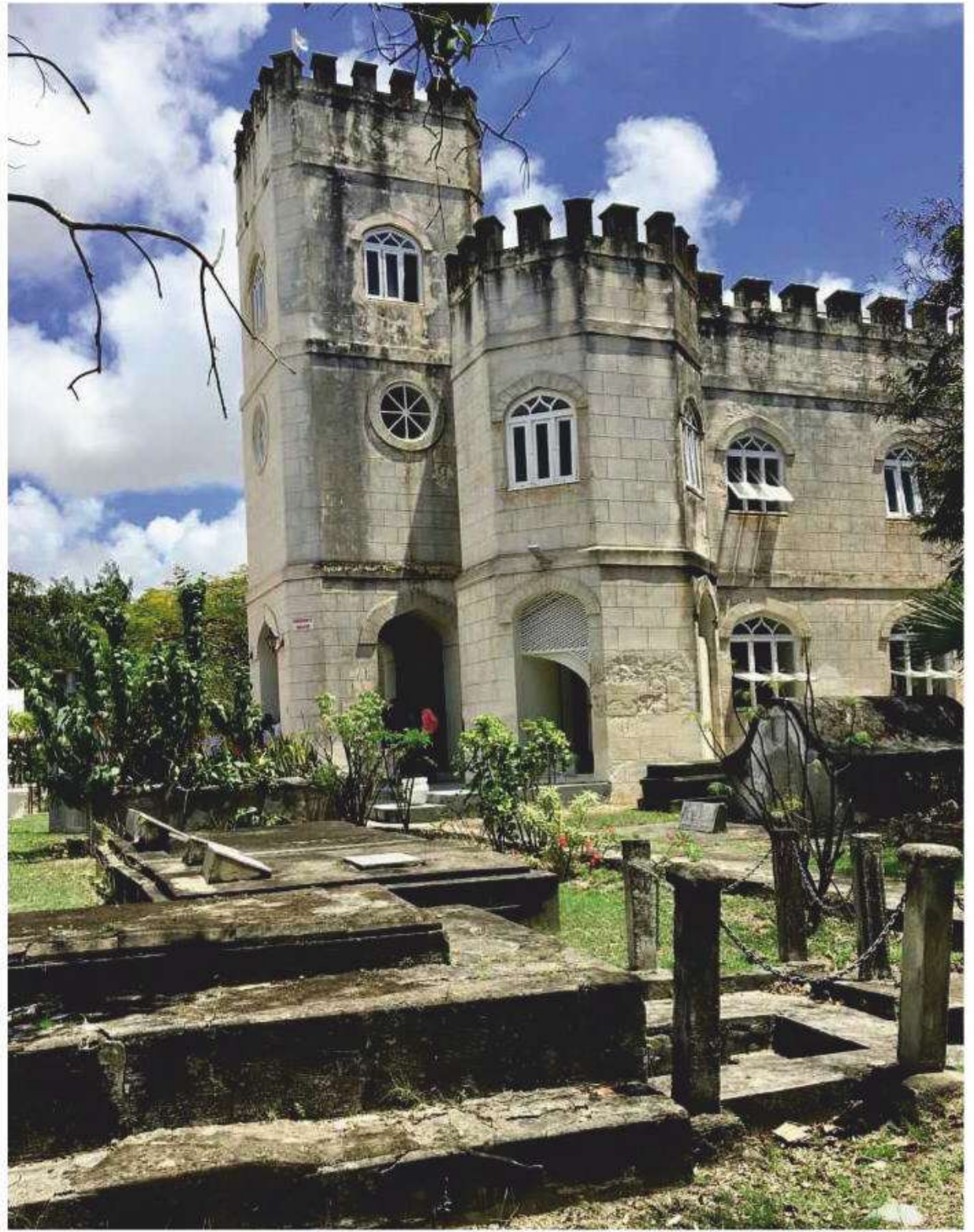
Some have suggested that gases escaping from the decomposing corpses could somehow cause the coffins to move. This is implausible for many reasons, including that escaping gases might perhaps cause a coffin to crack open, but the vessel would neither explode nor jostle, except perhaps momentarily and unnoticeably as the pressure escaped (just as a carbonated drink doesn't jump out of your hand when you open the tab).

Lastly, some have suggested that lightning might somehow have moved the coffins. Barbados, like many Caribbean islands, is subject to frequent hurricanes, at times accompanied by lightning strikes. Attempting to address the lack of plausible mechanism by which lightning would move the coffins, Brian Ridout recently advanced this theory in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*. He states that the electric current created by a lightning strike could be responsible for the mystery; the electrical energy "will spread away from the point of lightning strike in a series of concentric circles losing power as it travels and inducing a strong magnetic field... The magnetic effect has been detectable up to 40m [130ft] from the point of strike in desert soils... If the current reaches a lead coffin then it will induce a magnetic field, which will be a dipole... creating a positive and a negative end to the coffin. Because the coffins were all aligned the same way, the induced charges at the head ends and at the feet ends would have been similar for each. The effect would only last for a fraction of a second because lead does not hold a magnetic field, but during that fraction of a second like charges will repel and unlike charges will attract. If the coffins were small or unstable then they would move as far as there was room to do so."

Ridout acknowledges that there is no evidence that an electricity-conducting pole was anywhere near the Chase Vault in 1820, but suggests that the nearby church roof might have been hit. The church structure that existed during the early 1800s is long gone, but Ridout notes that a 1936 source affirms that the current church was built upon the foundations of its predecessors, and thus that "the Chase vault will always have been close to the bell tower at the west end."

Despite the many assumptions, unknowns, and caveats inherent in this hypothesis, I endeavoured to investigate this idea as best I could. I consulted a physicist, who saw no glaring errors but suggested more information would be useful to assess its validity – a situation I addressed with my onsite visit. One important measurement missing from Ridout's calculations was how far the Chase Vault is from the (existing) foundation. From the nearest foundation corner (at the tallest point on that side of the church) to the vault is about 40ft (12m).

Ridout notes that an electric current can



ABOVE: Christ Church Parish Church, Oistins, with the vault in the foreground.

be detected up to 40m (130ft) from a strike under some circumstances – but merely being *detected* is a very low bar indeed. The question of whether it could be strong enough to plausibly create a dipole powerful enough to violently jolt the coffins is another matter entirely. Accurately gauging electrical conductivity through substrate is a fraught and imprecise task; indeed, "Earth's surficial materials cover a wide range of electrical conductivity values. Bedrock alone can vary from conductivities of 10 to 100 siemens per metre in certain massive sulphide deposits and graphite zones down to 0.00001 siemens per metre for certain unweathered igneous rocks and carbonates, a span of seven orders of magnitude. These are rough guides, however – depending on factors like weathering state, porosity, and water content, itself linked to porosity, these values can change drastically... Water also varies considerably in conductivity depending on its state and ionic content – salt water can [be highly conductive] while fresh water

[e.g., rainwater which would accompany an electrical storm] is less conductive... Further complicating the picture are overburden, soil, vegetation, and anthropogenic infrastructure".<sup>5</sup>

The reference to "anthropogenic infrastructure" is especially relevant in this case; the church grounds are not a uniform surface through which a current would travel but instead have steps, pathways, vegetation, and so on, as well as the other vaults. In fact, I counted at least a dozen similar vaults on the west side of the church, where the Chase Vault is located, within about the same radius of the church; these would potentially have been just as affected by a lightning strike as the Chase Vault. If Ridout's hypothesis is correct, presumably one or more of the other, similarly situated (and lightning-vulnerable) vaults would also demonstrate a similar mysterious disarray. Should Ridout wish to test his explanation, he could seek to have them opened, or scanned with ground-penetrating radar.

BENJAMIN RADFORD



## INVESTIGATING THE VAULT

Because the Chase Vault is accessible and open to the public, it may yield physical clues to confirm or refute parts of the **legend**. Though the mysterious events happened some two centuries ago, the vault has by all accounts been preserved more or less as it was in the 1800s, with a few notable and easily identified exceptions. The interior bricks, for example, are original and would likely reveal physical evidence of such acts as heavy lead coffins being violently tossed about inside a small vault.

Brian Ridout debunked one of the common claims about the vault, one illustrated in the book *Death Deeds*: that the entrance to the vault (a key part of the story) had sloping sides. “The ‘stone against the sloping side’ became part of the mythology and is mentioned in Aspinall (1912) and Gould (1928) even though both authors include a photograph of the vault showing that the story is impossible. There are no sloping sides and the burial chamber is mostly subterranean.”

There is little or no evidence that a stone slab was ever placed on the vault’s horizontal entrance; writers have taken great pains to describe its nearly impossible weight (requiring six or seven straining men to move it) but an examination of the lip and edges of the vault (both on the surface of the current slab and beneath it) show no tell-tale damage, gouges, or deep scratches which would inevitably result from a huge stone slab being placed (and replaced) over the vault.

The interior walls and ceiling are lined with red bricks and stone, which are in excellent condition for their age (protected as they are from sun and rain) yet reveal no sign at all of any significant forces being applied to them. The universal detail of the lead-lined coffins being heavy undermines the veracity of the legend, especially given the tight quarters of that vault. Had the coffins moved so dramatically (spun 90 or 180 degrees in some accounts), their corners

would surely have struck the bricks and left many marks. Yet an examination of the bricks reveal little if any damage other than some salt seepage and discoloration. The vault interior is, thankfully, vandalism free – perhaps because of the reverence locals have for the church and/or the power of the vault’s curse.

Once the natural explanations have been disregarded, that of course leaves us with the supernatural ones, and in that event one is as good as another: anything from ghosts (Caribbean *duppies*) to curses, gremlins, and psychokinetic energy *could* have moved the coffins, and there is exactly equal evidence for any of those. Some supernatural explanations may, however, point us in the right direction because they draw upon local lore and legends.

## LORE AND LEGEND

Folklore, a third category of explanation for the Chase Vault story – neither a (real) natural event nor a (real) supernatural one – has been largely neglected in previous research. All these hypotheses put the cart before the horse, in that they assume that the Chase Vault story is substantially true as told. Before attempting to explain something we must first be sure there is something to explain. We need not puzzle over the



particulars of how the coffins could have moved by themselves in the sealed vault if there’s no real evidence they ever did.

The various accounts of events at the Chase Vault are confused and contradictory, as noted earlier. This would be less of a problem if contemporary corroboration could be found. After all, the events were alleged to have caused considerable consternation and fear throughout the island. Yet researchers have found absolutely nothing in church records, newspapers, or other sources that suggest anything unusual or mysterious happened at the Chase Vault at any time.

Nickell notes that an 1842 book by Isaac Orderson, the rector’s own brother, about historical Barbados “contained not the slightest reference to the Barbados coffins mystery”. Furthermore, according to Ridout, an 1866 record of the events, appearing in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Combermere*, “which should have been important, was written after Combermere’s death by his wife, and is a rehash of the [“imaginary”] *Death Deeds* story, with only a few words altered... I have searched his official correspondence, retained in the National Archive, but there is no mention of the event.” The complete lack of reference to such a remarkable series of events *over the course of eight years* (1812 to 1820) in any published records is perhaps as great a mystery as the moving coffins themselves.

The evidence that the whole story is a fictional account is overwhelming. At every turn it is plagued by exaggerations, irrefutable errors, and irreconcilable contradictions. Even the staunchest advocate of the Chase Vault mystery readily admits that at least some, if not much, of the story is embellished and wrong in various particulars. The issue is not that somewhere amid the confused and contradictory welter of demonstrable embellishments, rumours, and third-hand sources there’s a genuine unsolved mystery involving restless coffins. The Chase Vault story does not merely *contain* legend; it *is itself* legend.

In the early 1980s Joe Nickell assembled literary evidence that Freemasons were involved in the legend. Ridout, while acknowledging that some of the prominent people involved were probably Masons, writes that “The difficulty in finding a natural cause has led to the suggestion that the derangement of coffins never happened and the likely perpetrators of the charade were Freemasons. We are informed (Nickell, 1982) that the story is loaded with Masonic symbolism, but this must be viewed with caution... Symbols should not be confused with facts... Orderson’s epitaph on his memorial stone recalls his fervent piety and it is difficult to imagine him conniving in the eviction of the Chase family so that their vault could be used for Masonic ritual.”

But this mischaracterises Nickell, who neither claimed nor suggested that Orderson or anyone else was “conniving in the eviction of the Chase family so that their vault could



**ABOVE:** The interior walls and ceiling of the vault are lined with red brick and stone, all in excellent condition for their age and showing no signs of damage from the movement of heavy, lead-lined coffins.





ABOVE: His investigation complete, the author emerges from the vault.

be used for Masonic ritual.” The fact that an early version of the Chase Vault story is arguably infused with Masonic allegory signifies nothing more than that whoever recorded that particular version was versed in Freemasonry and added those elements to a pre-existing legend while retelling it – more on that presently.

Regardless of whether or not the Chase Vault coffins genuinely moved, why do people – and Bajans in particular – believe they moved? To CJ Hinds, it was not surprising that the Chase dead were disturbed, because, as he told me, the “family fought in life, and they fought in death. And the only way to separate the fighting, in the end, was to put them in different parts of the church cemetery... They were dabbling in black arts, and it went to the graves with them. They were fighting amongst themselves in life – over the land, over money, relations – it was always problems with that family, and they took it directly to the grave.”

This “in death as in life” folkloric theme of course holds a moral lesson for those who hear and repeat it: get along with your family, don’t quarrel with neighbours, and so on. Note that Barbados is referred to by Hines as a morally upright, Christian (i.e., Anglican) nation to whom evil was introduced from elsewhere in the form of the wicked Chase family. I was reminded of another Caribbean ghost legend I’d investigated in nearby Jamaica – Annie Palmer, the White Witch of Rose Hall (see FT239:44-49), another story of a cruel and quarrelsome family schooled in

black magic that had come from elsewhere. (Colonel Chase, like Palmer of the Rose Hall Plantation, is said to have been especially cruel to his slaves and family.)

### OTHER RESTLESS COFFIN LEGENDS

The Chase Vault story is only one of several legends – perhaps a half-dozen or more – involving mysteriously moving coffins in supposedly sealed vaults around the world.

Lang recounts an identical tale from June 1844 regarding a Lutheran cemetery in Ahrensburg, on the island of Oesel in the Baltic Sea, adding that despite considerable investigation no evidence of such happenings was ever discovered, and that the “disturbances precisely parallel” those described at the Chase Vault: “It will be observed that the Oelsen and the Barbados tales are precisely similar in every respect.” Lang describes another case in Suffolk, England, referenced by a Sir James Clerke in 1833.

In fact we need not visit the British Isles or the Baltic to find other identical legends; though the Chase Vault is the most famous mystery on Barbados, the same thing happened only about seven miles (11km) to the north, in the parish of St Thomas. It involved a Welshman named William Asyggell Williams who moved to the island in the 1600s, and his family’s moving coffins. Records date the Williams family vault to at least 9 January 1741, demonstrating that the Williams Vault preceded the Chase Vault by at least 60 years.<sup>6</sup>

In his 1928 book *Barbados Diocesan History*,

Cannon Reece refers to a report noting that a “rather common feature among Barbados legends is the erratic behaviour in vaults of lead and copper coffins. There is of course the famous Christ Church story [as well as] *three or four other stories*” (quoted in Ridout, 2018). Even a solitary story of such a seemingly singular event would be curious, but four or five such stories about restless coffins on such a single small island is remarkable indeed.

Understood in context, the mystery of the Chase Vault is neither true nor hoax, natural nor supernatural; it is instead precisely what it appears to be: a legend. Some writers have intentionally embellished the tale, passing off fictional details as fact, but there’s no evidence that anyone (Freemason or otherwise) intentionally created or hoaxed the tale from whole cloth; instead, they did what all humans do when they hear a good story: they retold and changed it in the process, emphasising and adding different elements according to their beliefs and agendas. It’s served its purpose for over a century, providing fodder for mystery lovers while reminding Bajans to be kind to each other.

### NOTES

**1** Robert Schomburgk, *The History of Barbados, Comprising a Geographical and Statistical Description of the Island; a Sketch of the Historical Developments Since the Settlement; and an Account of its Geology and Natural Productions*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848.

**2** Joe Nickell, “Barbados’ restless coffins laid to rest”, *Fate*, 35:4 (April), pp50-56; Part II, 35:5 (May), pp79-86, 1982.

**3** Brian Ridout, “Research Note: An Analytical Review of the Chase Vault Mystery at Christ Church, Barbados”, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 82:4, pp219-239, 2018.

**4** Several writers have offered incorrect information about the elevation of the Chase Vault. Ridout claims that “the vault is on a prominence about 100ft above sea level,” and Nickell offers an estimate of “some 250ft”, which is closer; the entrance is at about 210ft above sea level as measured by iPhone GPS.

**5** James Berdahl, “Geological Effects on Lightning Strike Distributions”, Masters thesis, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, 2016. Available at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ea9f/165739e4322c35cc4bcf67b0514e7bfa0fa.pdf>.

**6** James Brandow (Ed.), *Genealogies of Barbados Families: From Caribbeana and The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, Baltimore, Maryland: Clearfield Company, 1983.

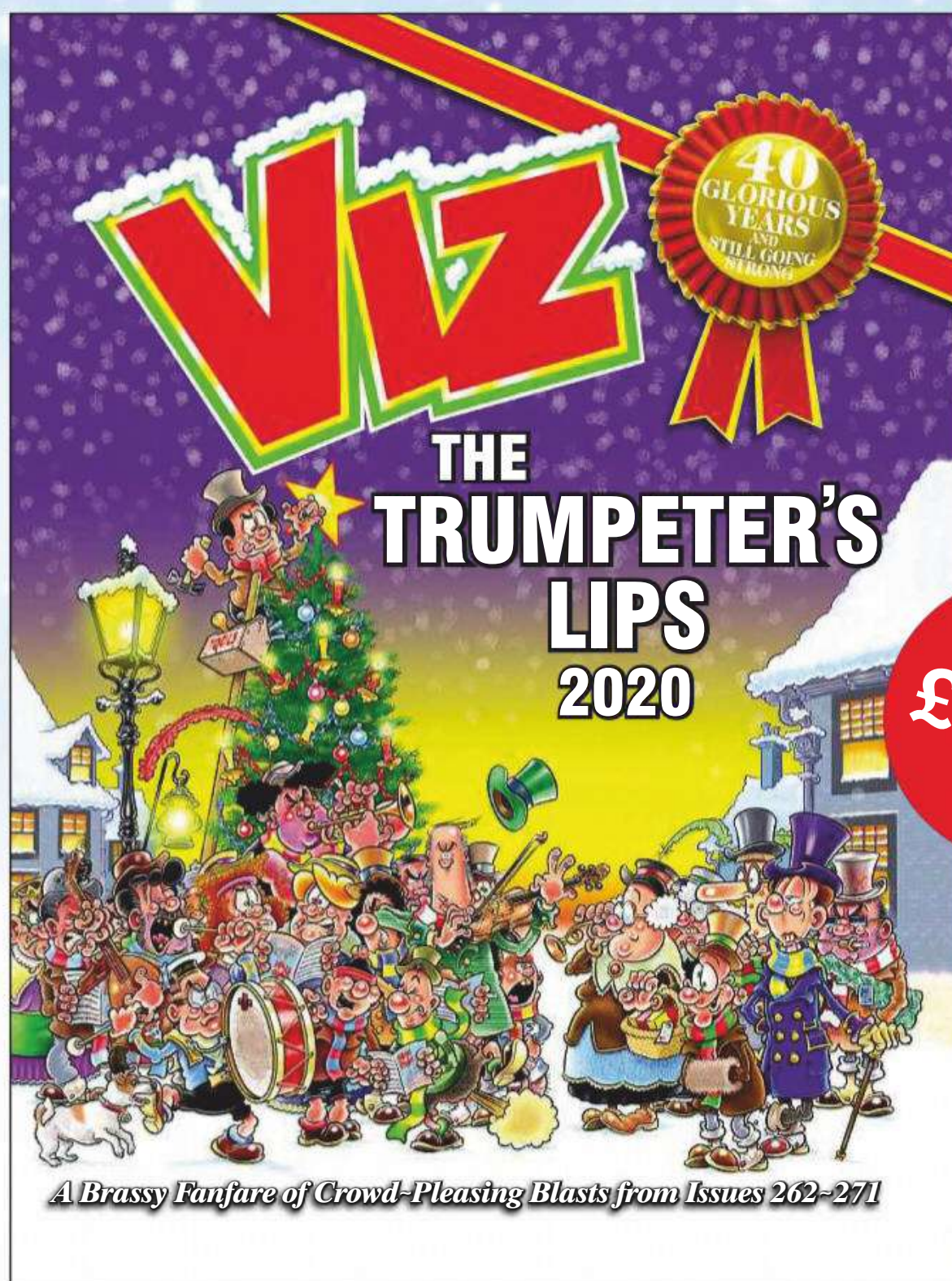
✦ BENJAMIN RADFORD is author of a dozen or so books, including *Tracking the Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore*, *Bad Clowns*, and most recently *Investigating Ghosts: The Scientific Search for Spirits*. He is a longtime FT contributor, a member of the American Folklore Society, and currently co-hosts a podcast called ‘Squaring the Strange’.



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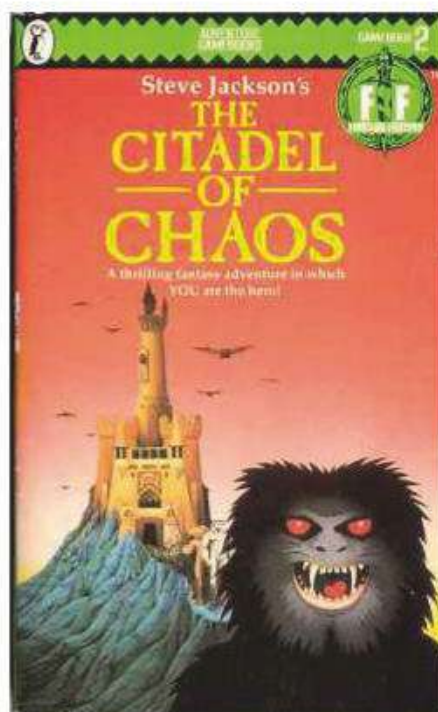
## Turn to paragraph 400...

**RYAN SHIRLOW** recalls the heyday of *Fighting Fantasy*, when he was the hero in his own fortean adventure...

This magazine has recently featured reappraisals of some iconic British books, films and TV shows from the 1970s and 80s (see **FT**:354:30-37, 379:38-43, 381:36-43). Key pieces of our pop cultural history, from *Bagpuss* to *The Wicker Man*, are undergoing a revival, with a new generation discovering the shared worlds these texts evoked, and perhaps the mirror they hold up to our times. But there has been a major gap in these nostalgic reviews of the era. For a generation of proto-forteans, it was the 'interactive' *Fighting Fantasy* novels of Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone that first introduced us to the monsters, mythology, language and concepts of forteana. By choosing your route through the numbered paragraphs, and with a bit of help from a lucky dice roll, *you* could be the hero of your own fortean adventure.

The computer games of the time are already viewed through a prism of fond remembrance, as seen in Charlie Brooker's recent *Black Mirror* hit 'Bandersnatch'. Yet, the capabilities of these games were limited; they lacked the lush artwork, purple prose, and pocket-sized portability and affordability of these little green books. At their peak, the *Fighting Fantasy* novels sold over 13 million copies internationally across nearly 60 original titles published by Puffin, and launched what later became the Games Workshop/Warhammer empire. Today they are largely forgotten.

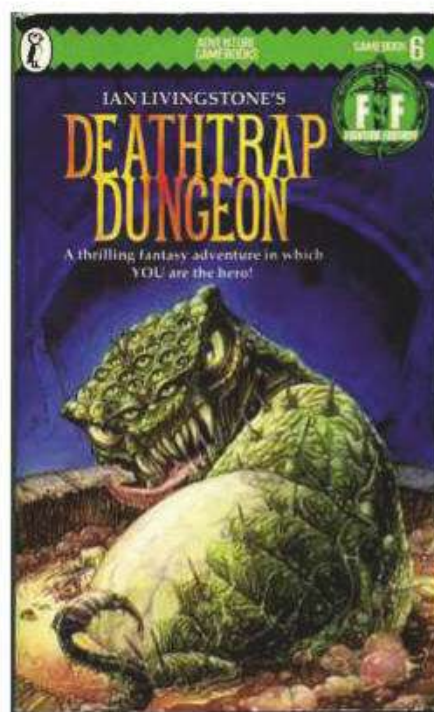
Starting in 1982 with *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*, the series' authors ransacked high fantasy (elves, orcs, hobbits), modern gothic (vampires, zombies,



poltergeists), mediæval bestiaries (golems, gargoyles, ogres) and classical history (the Hydra, the Minotaur, the Harpy). They freely purloined the folk bogies of these islands (leprechauns, banshees, hags) and other cultures (dragons, genies, elementals) and threw in a few real animals, often in giant, mutated or supernatural form (cryptids, wild men, lycanthropes). And, of course, there were ordinary humans in their many guises (pirates, guards, henchmen) and the sinister warlords and necromancers who employed them. A handful of the books even delved into science fiction, featuring robots, space travel and renegade genetic engineers.

The early books, for example *Citadel of Chaos* (Book 2) have a surreal, fairytale feel, with the reader exploring dungeons or castles which don't entirely make sense and are populated with weird and whimsical entities that can either help or hinder you. As a result, they have retained a unique and disturbing charm all their own. *House of Hell* (Book 10) is an unusual Hammer Horror homage, with the player attempting to escape from a haunted mansion full of modern-day Devil worshippers.

The later, arguably darker, books tried to build more internally consistent and largely



mediæval worlds and used these to introduce a number of adult themes to their teenage readership. *Dead of Night* (Book 40) explored religion, faith, and a terrifying plague. Both *Phantoms of Fear* (Book 28) and *Night Dragon* (Book 52) saw the reader progress through a spiritual dream world. Completing *Siege of Sardath* (Book 49) required you to master the basics of alchemy and brew the correct potions. The player starts *Creature of Havoc* (Book 24) with the mother of all hangovers, and slowly discovers not an embarrassing tattoo from the night before, but the fact that they have been transformed into a hideous reptilian beast with little control over their actions. Just as in the average stag-do, you can gradually restore your higher functions by releasing a series of sacred elven spirit guides or eating the odd terrified hobbit. *Black Vein Prophecy* (Book 42) similarly places the lead character in a fugue state, in which they must slowly piece together what has happened to them or risk being trapped in an endless cycle of reincarnation.

Secret organisations and conspiracies feature regularly. Forteans might recognise the inspiration behind the 'Rosy Challice' cult in *Moonrunner* (Book 48). Parallel worlds and alternate realities are explored in the inspired

*Spectral Stalkers* (Book 45), in which the hero is pursued across worlds by a mysterious, tentacled, Lovecraftian nemesis in search of the wondrous Aleph. The series even got to grips with various mathematical and philosophical concepts, tormenting the reader with logical paradoxes, recursive loops, and complex critical paths. Many books – like *Chasms of Malice* (Book 30) – have a very small number of meandering routes to successful completion. An exception is the extraordinary *Scorpion Swamp* (Book 8), which creates a world with a startling degree of freedom of movement and action, allowing the reader to revisit areas and pursue alternative goals. Such non-linear play might be common enough in modern console games, but remains an absolutely remarkable achievement in a pocket-sized paperback book with a very basic set of rules.

The series was undeniably a product of its time; despite some notable exceptions, this is largely a Western and very white fantasy universe; perhaps the real mystery is what all the women were up to, as they don't feature much in the action, cropping up only in the form of the occasional barmaid, witch or evil sorceress. There have been various attempts to relaunch the franchise over the years, with *The Fast Show*'s Charlie Higson publishing the brand new adventure *The Gates of Death* in 2018. But in our high-tech world, game books have become a nostalgic footnote. I'm afraid that future forteans will find and fight their monsters in glorious CGI rather than in the well-thumbed pages of a yellowing paperback.

### FURTHER READING

Jonathan Green, *You are the Hero: A History of Fighting Fantasy Gamebooks*, Snowbooks, 2014; Malthus Dire's Fighting Fantasy Page: <http://ffreviewermalthusd.blogspot.com>

◆ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a musician and occasional writer, currently working undercover as a civil servant and father of two.



## A bang on the head

**MARK GREENER** explains how traumatic brain injury can change personality, creating serial killers and even vampires.

**M**y favourite character in the Sixties *Batman* TV series is William Omaha McElroy. His origin may have seemed unlikely – a bang on the head transforms the mild-mannered Professor of Egyptology at Yale University into the arch-villain King Tut, played with undisguised relish by Victor Buono – but psychotic and antisocial behaviour after head injuries is no joke. Bangs on the bonce have led to violent crime, serial killing and even a rather tragic case of vampirism.

A 38-year-old “neatly groomed” biological male “wearing female attire” went to an Emergency Department in Florida with a self-inflicted cut to her left forearm. She strongly denied self-harm. Rather she wanted to “fulfil a thirst for blood and flesh”. She told doctors that chewing the inside of her mouth until it bled usually satiated her desire for blood, but when she was especially distressed, this wasn’t enough. So she sliced her forearm with a hobby knife and “chewed the fat deposits, gnawed on it for a while and sucked it to try and get as much blood as possible”. She denied drinking the blood of animals or other humans.

She later told a psychiatrist that she experienced a traumatic brain injury – the medical term for a head injury – at 23 years of age while serving in the military. She had remained unconscious for three weeks. After waking, she started chewing the inside of her mouth to draw blood and, after her discharge, cut herself. Doctors diagnosed



ABOVE: Phineas Gage, photographed holding the rod that tore through his skull.

gender identity disorder when she was 31 years of age. But her desire to drink blood dated back to adolescence. She had avid interest in vampires, including *True Blood*, the *Twilight Saga* and Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*.

Sadly, she couldn’t afford sex-reassignment surgery. This stimulated a desire to sever her penis, which she thought would force reassignment. This desire faded when she realised that reassignment needs an intact penis. But she fantasised about autocastration or “bursting” one of her testicles. Two years after she cut her forearm, she was living “semi-independently” with her parents’ support and had an active social life as a woman. Her autovampiristic behaviour continues.<sup>1</sup>

Your brain is split into two hemispheres, each of which controls movements and other

functions on the opposite side of the body. Each hemisphere has several lobes, areas dedicated to specific tasks. The frontal lobes – which, as the name suggests, are behind your forehead – influence, for instance, personality, behaviour, decision-making and emotion. So, damage to the frontal lobes can cause impulsive and antisocial behaviour.<sup>2</sup> (Strictly speaking, damage to the prefrontal cortex, the outer layer covering part of the frontal lobes, seems responsible for most of the behavioural changes. See Adrian Raine’s book *The Anatomy of Violence* for an accessible introduction.)

Brain scans revealed damage to the Florida woman’s frontal lobes. While she had a long-standing interest in vampires, the brain injury might have ‘disinhibited’ her: she became more likely to follow her internal

drives and feelings, and felt less need to follow cultural and societal norms.

The classic example of frontal lobe damage took place on 13 September 1848, when an explosion sent a 13lb, 1¼ inch diameter iron rod tearing through the head of Phineas Gage, until then a 25-year-old respectable, responsible and mild-mannered rail worker. The 3ft 7in rod travelled 80ft after leaving his skull. Remarkably, he survived (see FT38:30, 258:18-19).<sup>3</sup>

But after the accident, Gage became, his doctor John Harlow commented, “fitful” and “irreverent”, with “little deference for his fellows”. Gage indulged “in the grossest profanities”, which wasn’t his habit before the accident, and, Harlow recounted, became “impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires”. His friends and acquaintances said he was “no longer Gage”. It’s a common theme. Relatives of people who have experienced severe traumatic brain injury often report that the person is “not the way they used to be”. The personality change can be persistent: three-quarters (74 per cent) of relatives felt the person had changed five years after the accident.<sup>4</sup>

Personality changes after traumatic brain injury might even have changed history. In January 1536, Henry VIII and his horse fell heavily while jousting. He was unconscious for several hours. After Henry recovered, he was not the way he used to be. Before the joust, he was progressive and open-minded, but after his accident, he became paranoid and suspicious.<sup>5</sup> It would be fascinating to disinter his corpse and see if frontal lobe damage could have contributed to this dramatic change in character.

Certainly, traumatic brain injury can cause numerous



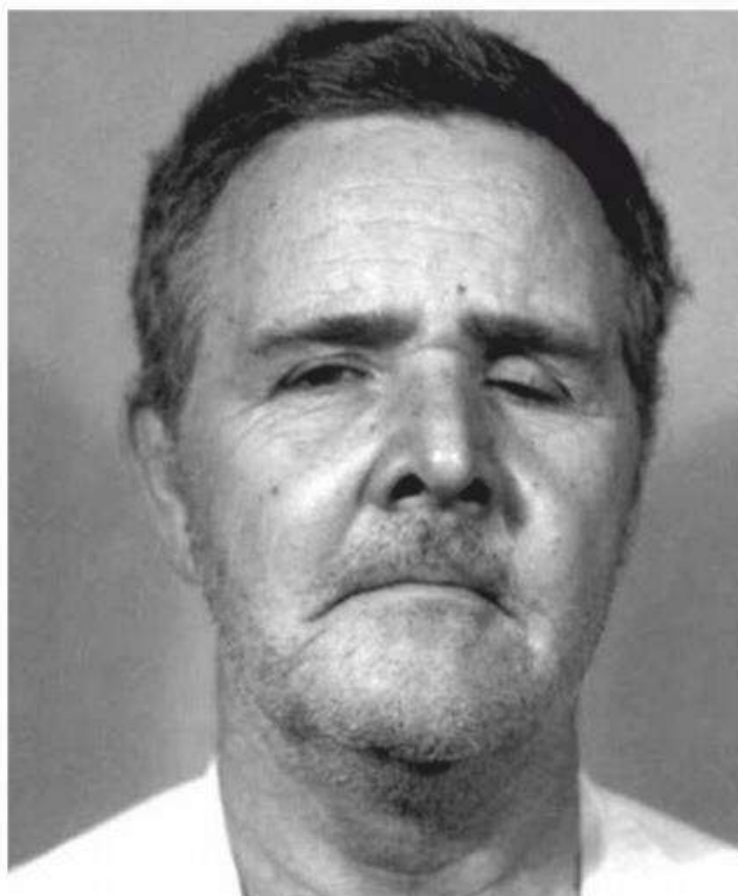


psychological changes, including agitation, aggression, irritability, drug and alcohol abuse, apathy, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorders and suicide. Indeed, between 1-in-3 and 1-in-10 (between 11 per cent and 34 per cent) of people show agitation or aggression after a traumatic brain injury.<sup>6</sup> Damage to some parts of the frontal lobes can cause “acquired sociopathy”; in other words, previously healthy people show psychopathic behaviour.

In one case, an iron bar struck the head of a “well-mannered” nine-year-old boy, who was “an excellent student”, fracturing his skull and extensively damaging the right frontal lobe. After the accident he became “easily distracted, disobedient... and quarrelsome”. His behaviour worsened as he aged, possibly partly caused by increasing social pressures. He wanted to be the centre of attention, made inappropriate comments and, after marrying, saw other women and prostitutes. He even gave them his home phone number. Yet other parts of his mind remained intact. While he underperformed academically and held down menial jobs, he could recite long passages from the Bible and occasionally surveyed rural properties.<sup>7</sup>

Yet not everyone with brain damage becomes a psychopath or antisocial. Most violent criminals, for example, are compelled by violence or the threat of force to “submit to an aggressive authority figure” when they’re children. So, put rather crudely, the child ‘learns’ to use violence as a means to deal with people.<sup>8</sup>

Serial killer Henry Lee Lucas offers a tragic example. His alcoholic, sadistic, prostitute mother regularly abused him as a child, psychologically and



## “Henry Lee Lucas never really had a chance in life”

physically. When Henry was seven years old, his mother hit him on the head with a wooden board. He lay semiconscious for three days, ignored by his family. Her pimp eventually took Henry to a hospital claiming he’d fallen from a ladder. Scans of Lucas’s brain later showed extensive brain damage, including to areas involved in emotion and behaviour. After 15 years on death row, Texas governor George W Bush commuted the sentence to life imprisonment – the only time he overturned a death sentence as governor. Lucas died of natural causes in prison in 2001.<sup>9</sup> As Adrian Raine notes: “Henry Lee Lucas never really had a chance in life”.<sup>10</sup>

Criminologist and former prison governor David Wilson argues convincingly that serial killers tend to emerge in societies whose social and economic structures value one group over another, in which people feel “isolated and

distanced from one another” and “when bonds of mutual support have been all but eradicated”. Such societies often exclude certain groups – such as children, young people living away from home, the LGBT community, sex workers and the elderly – from their full protection. And these groups tend to be the victims of serial killers and other forms of violence.<sup>11</sup> In other words, injuries to the frontal lobes can unleash a person’s aggressive tendencies, and they often choose their victims from the vulnerable, the disenfranchised and

the forgotten.

On the other hand, strong support networks might help prevent the emergence of serial killers, allowing people to live safely despite extensive brain damage. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, a 21-year-old university student climbed out of a window to escape the political opposition. He tried to descend down the drainpipe, but it came away from the wall and he fell onto a spiked metal gate. One of the spikes entered the left side of his forehead and exited on the right, passing through and extensively damaging his frontal lobes. He survived, but became impatient, restless and impulsive.

He did not, however, develop the antisocial and psychopathic tendencies seen in some others with similar damage. But the Spanish man had strong social support. His family was wealthy, he married his girlfriend three years after being impaled, and his children supported him as he aged. The Spanish man held down a manual job, albeit under supervision, at the family firm. Raine notes that the case “highlights the critical importance of psychosocial protective factors that can guard against a life of crime” despite “horrendous” damage to the frontal lobes.<sup>12</sup>

**ABOVE:** Serial killer Henry Lee Lucas was found to have suffered severe brain damage as a child.

So changes to the frontal lobes are not the only links in the chain that leads from brain damage to disinhibited personality to violence and murder. Hopefully, understanding the underlying causes of violence will help us devise ways to prevent the progression to violence and support rehabilitation and counselling. Frontal lobe damage isn’t, as we’ve seen, the only factor underlying violence. Indeed, ‘organised’ killers who carefully plan their premeditated murder may show normal levels of prefrontal activity. But for some people damage to the frontal lobes is part of the network of mutually reinforcing strands that cause them to become violent, antisocial, or even a vampire.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hervey et al. *World Journal of Clinical Cases* 2016;4:138-4.
- <sup>2</sup> Adrian Raine, *The Anatomy of Violence: The Biological Roots of Crime*, Pantheon Books, 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Thiebaut de Schotten et al. *Cerebral Cortex* 2015;25:4812-4827; Grieve, *Trauma* 2010;12:171-174.
- <sup>4</sup> Stéfán et al., *Annals of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* 2016;59:5-17.
- <sup>5</sup> Stavrova et al., *European Journal of Personality* 2019;33:52-71.
- <sup>6</sup> Saoût et al., *Annals of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine* 2011;54:259-269.
- <sup>7</sup> Bahia et al., *Dementia & Neuropsychologia* 2013;7:132-135.
- <sup>8</sup> Brian Innes, *Serial Killers*, Index Books, 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 14 Mar 2001: [www.nytimes.com/2001/03/14/us/henry-lee-lucas-64-murderer-who-said-he-killed-hundreds.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/14/us/henry-lee-lucas-64-murderer-who-said-he-killed-hundreds.html)
- <sup>10</sup> Raine, op.cit.
- <sup>11</sup> David Wilson, *A History of British Serial Killing*, Sphere, 2009.
- <sup>12</sup> Raine, op.cit.

♦ **MARK GREENER** is a Cambridge-based medical writer and clinical editor of *Pharmacy Magazine*. He writes regularly for a wide variety of publications, including *Fortean Times*.



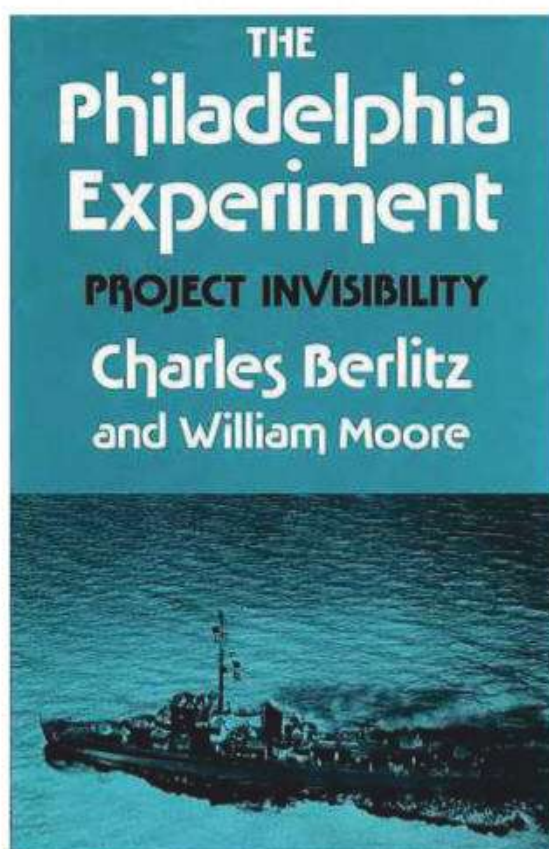
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## NO 50. NOT THE SHIPPING FORECAST

Who remembers Charles Berlitz these days? If you don't: he was all over the place (in more ways than one) in the 1970s and for much of the '80s, confecting books about Atlantis, resurrecting the Roswell Incident – which now refuses to die – and elaborating on the Bermuda Triangle (see No 34 [FT368:56-57] in this series), as well as dabbling in ancient astronautics and the hunt for Noah's Ark. Actual historians and other interested parties hold Berlitz's 'findings' in rather low esteem – even to the point of saying he invented stuff – so you may be wondering why we feature one of his best-known books here. It's here partly because Berlitz had a knack, and a very profitable one, for gathering all kinds of odds and ends about various allegedly mysterious events that otherwise would probably have languished in old magazines and, by darning them together with some fresh research, turning them into highly readable, seminal summaries of the 'case'; and so he became a 'name' in fortean circles. This particular book stands as a fine example of his technique. And it's also here because it's an excellent, not to say egregious, instance of the art of avoiding the obvious conclusions from your research and so maintaining the ancient craft of mystery-mongering. Welcome, then, to the Philadelphia Experiment.

The core of the story of what the legend on the book's cover calls "the top-secret World War II experiment that shattered the barriers of possibility" is easily enough told. In October 1943, while at sea with a convoy, the destroyer escort USS *Eldridge*, DE173, displacement 1,646 tonnes fully laden, was seen by sailors aboard the SS *Andrew Fursureth*, to disappear into invisibility. Later that month, the *Eldridge* was docked in the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. Various pieces of secret equipment were placed on board. Then the ship vanished again – zap – now you see it, now you don't. From out of nowhere it then appeared in the water next to the Liberty ship SS *Andrew Furuseth* (her again), docked in Norfolk, Virginia, some 200 miles (320km) away. (Liberty ships were mass-produced, 14,000-ton ships, built in the USA to a British design, to carry cargo, troops and prisoners-of-war in the convoys of World War II.) After a few minutes, the *Eldridge* disappeared again, and reappeared at its mooring in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. According to the original source, the US Navy considered the experiment a success, but for one drawback: the effects on the crew. A fair few went mad. A couple spontaneously combusted ("went into the FLAME"), and burned for 18 days. Two went to a bar with their shipmates and just... disappeared. Another, in front of his wife and children, walked through a wall in his quarters and was never seen again. Others were found dead, embedded in the ship's



hull. The whole thing was based on some aspect of Einstein's unified field theory, and directed by a Dr Franklin Reno.

Before cogitating on the difficulties with even this truncated account – which difficulties Berlitz and Moore don't address – we should see where it all came from. In 1955, Morris K Jessup published *The Case for the UFO*, in which he argued his case that UFOs were propelled by some kind of anti-gravity device. Jessup had a master's degree in astrophysics, and had

worked on but not completed a PhD thesis. Somehow, for some years, he is said to have become involved in various archaeological expeditions, but seems to have spent most of his life selling automobile parts, while writing books and lecturing on UFOs. Not long after the paperback of *The Case for the UFO* came out, Jessup had a letter from a Carlos Miguel Allende, that Berlitz and Moore describe as "written in a rambling, scrawly hand in several different types of colours of pencil and pen, and in a very odd style. Capitalisations appeared in the midst of sentences, words were oddly used and misspelled, and punctuation, where employed at all, seemed almost to have been thrown in as some sort of afterthought. Entire phrases were frequently underscored in different colours of ink." Anyone even remotely familiar with publishing will recognise the type, respond appropriately (*Oh dear, not another nutter*) and consign the epistle to the circular filing cabinet. Not so Berlitz and Moore, and certainly not Jessup. He asked for more details. These arrived in May 1956, in the same haphazard style, but this time signed 'Carl M Allen'. There weren't really any more details, but Allen rather rashly suggested he would remember everything if given a dose of sodium pentothal and then hypnotised, in the then-common if mistaken belief that "The mind does NOT ever forget, Not really, As you know." Just before he signed off, Allen wheeled back to Jessup's favourite subject – propulsion systems: "Perhaps already, the Navy has used this accident of transport to build your UFO's. It is a logical advance from any standpoint." Depending on your logic, of course.

Meanwhile, Allen had sent – anonymously – a heavily annotated copy (writing in several shades of pink, according to one account) of Jessup's book to the officer commanding the Office of Naval Research, Admiral N Furth (his name was actually Frederick R Furth, and he was a rear admiral). It's unlikely Furth ever saw this, but three of his underlings – USMC Major Darrell Ritter, Cdr George Hoover USN, and Capt. Sidney Sherby USN – did. They were working on satellite technology, but also interested in anti-gravity research, according to Berlitz and Moore. The trio seem to have taken



Allen's ramblings seriously, as they summoned Jessup to Washington to discuss them: and Jessup recognised Allen's inimitable style. So they wanted to see his letters. They then arranged for the letters and Jessup's book with Allen's annotations (in red ink) to be retyped in their entirety; the result, with an introduction by Hoover and Sherby, was mimeographed and spiral-bound and 127 copies were run off – published – by a defence contractor, the Varo Manufacturing Company of Garland, Texas. Thus the weird saga came, more or less, into the public domain. But not many people knew about it, and for years it was mostly the subject of rumour and speculation.

Berlitz and Moore then meander into a discussion of the last few years of Jessup's life, which ended in suicide in April 1959. Apart from an excursion into the life of Thomas Townsend Brown (1905-85), who thought he was on the way to creating an anti-gravity machine (but wasn't), that's almost the last we hear of any identifiable human. Instead we have a series of 'informants' masquerading under cover of pseudonyms. Allen mentioned that the Experiment had been carried out under the direction of "my friend Dr Franklin Reno" which turns out to be a combination of the names of two small towns near where Allen grew up. Moore manages to track this individual down and interviews him, giving him a further pseudonym, 'Dr Rhinehart'. Given that the authors say this character died "a little more than year" before they finished the book, one has to suppress various cynical thoughts as to why they bothered maintaining the cover. The alleged 'Rhinehart' lives in some undisclosed out-of-the-way place and keeps interrupting the conversation with Moore to peer out of the window at the street, presumably looking for men in black; it doesn't seem to occur to either of them that the MIB might lurk at the back of the house. Nearly needless to say, Rhinehart, in a vague, prolix and roundabout way, kind-of confirms Berlitz and Moore's judgement that Carl Allen was essentially telling the truth.

To be fair, they also address Allen's confession of a hoax to Jim Lorenzen of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), which occurred "in the privacy of a parked automobile" in Tucson, Arizona, in June 1969. According to the authors, this was "revenge" on the Varo company for publishing, *sans* permission or remuneration, his annotations on Jessup's book; but they carefully note that Allen confesses only that some of those notes are "the craziest [*sic*] pack of lies I ever wrote". Whereas "Allende's confession purposely falls short of saying that [his account of] the Philadelphia Experiment itself was a



ABOVE: The USS *Eldridge*, clearly visible in this photo.

discovery of just such a German mine in November 1939) says plainly: "It could be said that degaussing, correctly done, makes a ship 'invisible' to the sensors of magnetic mines, but the ship remains visible to the human eye, radar, and underwater listening devices." Perhaps more to the point, the technique was operational in time to

degauss some 400 vessels before they joined the Dunkirk evacuation flotilla: so there was nothing new about it in autumn 1943. Moore and Berlitz aren't interested, but here seems to be the seed from which Allen grew his fantasy of USS *Eldridge* disappearing from sight – not once, but twice.

Now consider that claim. First, the US Navy is supposed to have sent the *Eldridge* with a load of secret machinery on convoy duty, potentially at the mercy of German U-boats, and tested its invisibility kit in broad daylight. Does that sound sensible? One of the key aspects of the convoy system was that ships remained in sight of one another. Apart from the implausibility of the initial proposition, it is surely passing strange that only Carl Allen and a handful of others seem to have noticed the *Eldridge* vanish. And then there's the 216-strong crew, who supposedly went bonkers or were otherwise sorely indisposed. Neither Allen nor Berlitz and Moore seem to have wondered who drove the ship home, or anything about transferring a necessary new crew from another warship, or ships. Then consider the *Eldridge*'s teleportation from the Philadelphia Yard to Norfolk and back. Does anyone mention the watery ruckus that plucking at least 1,700 tonnes of ship from the oggin would make, or the effect of the sudden displacement of said 1,700 tonnes of water when it plonked itself back in Philadelphia? No. By asking such elementary questions the holes in Berlitz and Moore's research, and in their account, soon become visible. And, as it happens, crewmembers (and the ship's log) maintain that, actually, the *Eldridge* never did dock in Philadelphia anyway. Oh. For what it's worth, even John Keel thought Allen was schizoid.

As we said earlier, the book should be read for its mystery-mongering technique – for what it *doesn't* explore as much as for what it claims. And if you want to know more, we highly recommend Andrew H Hochheimer's web pages ([www.de173.com/](http://www.de173.com/)), which will tell you just about everything you need to know. Happy reading!

Charles Berlitz and William Moore, *The Philadelphia Experiment: Project Invisibility*, Grosset & Dunlap, USA / Souvenir Press, UK, 1979

“THERE ARE  
BOOKS OF  
WHICH THE  
BACKS AND  
COVERS ARE BY  
FAR THE BEST  
PARTS.”  
*Charles Dickens*

hoax.” The impudent Mandy Rice-Davies is perhaps the best person to respond to that. The authors see what they want to see, and they are not beyond quoting their several anonymous correspondents and proceeding carefully to ignore the implications of what they're saying. For instance 'Colonel B' writes: "It is my educated guess that the allegations contained in [the Allende] letters regarding secret experiments were hoaxes of some sort. Yet... this information DID COME CLOSE to some of the actual circumstances of ACTUAL experiments (of a much less dramatic character)..." The authors also manage to overlook a rather large clue in what zoologist – and Berlitz's collaborator in researching Atlantis and the Bermuda Triangle – Dr J Manson Valentine tells them: "The experiment... had been accomplished by using naval-type magnetic generators, known as degaussers, which were 'pulsed' at resonant frequencies so as to 'create a tremendous magnetic field on and around a docked vessel.'"

This is accurate as far as it goes. Degaussing was a crafty British wheeze, employed in World War II (and ever since) to neutralise a ship's magnetic field and make it undetectable to magnetic mines, which were a crafty German wheeze. The Royal New Zealand Navy seems to have heard a whisper of the Philadelphia Experiment, as their museum website (<http://navymuseum.co.nz/degaussing-ships/>) – which includes a fascinating account of the serendipitous



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## Round and round in (stone) circles...

A misreading of Neolithic and Stonehenge-related literature results in this attractive alt archaeology book failing to deliver on the subtitle's proto-Druidic healing mission. And there are some howlers.

### Wisdomkeepers of Stonehenge

**The Living Libraries and Healers of Megalithic Culture**

Graham Phillips

Bear and Co 2019

Pb, 259pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781591432975

This book falls between so many stools that its legs are smashed. The central premise, only seriously discussed in the last 30 pages, is that Neolithic stone circles were built by, or for, proto-Druids so that the exact date – indeed, time of day (or, more likely, time of starry, starry night) – could be determined. Why? So that medicinal herbs could be collected when at their most potent. This secret group, with their restricted breeding programme, produced the red-haired (MC1R-bearing, slightly more cancer-prone) Celtic Druids of popular myth. Brahmin-like, they were protected and set apart from the rest of the population for millennia, as miraculous physicians, seers, keepers of the lore, even the *éminences grises* behind the quarrelsome, myriad rulers of Iron Age Britain. With the onslaught of Christianity, they fled Britain to survive in Ireland, only to return on the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and finally settle... in Biddulph, east of Crewe.

Although it reads like a proposal for an Alan Garner novel, the book's promise to disclose hidden Stonehenge-related Celtic arcane knowledge (their herbal cure for cancer seems to have been lost) is broken. To travel hopefully is better than to arrive. Oh, that it were... The majority of the paperback is a populist (often a euphemism for dumbed-down) 'straight' account of

the prehistory of the British Isles. This recounting of the 'journey of British natives/tribes' limps along well-trodden paths; it is dated, often inaccurate and based on secondary – even tertiary – sources. It is superfluous. In the last half-decade, there has been a shelfload of popular books on British prehistory and Stonehenge (like the *Beano* of old, there is a Stonehenge book every Christmas), by literate, competent professional archaeologists who have dug the sites. A number of these are written with enough speculation to keep most New Agers happy and colleagues bemused.

However, *Wisdomkeepers* is damaged by a background level of misreading/misunderstanding of the literature. Even worse, most of that literature is 'old'.

The text repeatedly states that the Stonehenge stone sockets were lined with animal bones to settle the stones, that all stone extraction is quarrying (British Neolithic quarrying in the strict sense is probably quite rare), the precision and continued effective use of carbon-14 dating are downplayed in favour of more recent techniques like rehydroxylation, which is still to be rigorously tested.

Almost all that is written about the Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age – especially in Wessex – is confused, with every 'culture' being tagged to an influx of a new 'tribe'. Hence all new 'cultures' are due to invasions of new folk, the weasel word here being 'invasion'.

It is sobering that 10–15-year-old texts (many of which are cited and used by Phillips) are now dated and 'wrong'; the pace of change in Neolithic (and Stonehenge) studies is

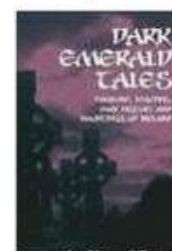
*"The best chapter is Phillips's succinct debunking of ley lines, especially Wessex ones."*

astonishing, and if a novel idea survives five years, it is doing well. Indeed, the full impact of the recent DNA work is yet to come, as academic ramparts are both built and breached.

There are howlers. The Stonehenge bluestones are "a particular type of dolerite known as plagioclase feldspar". Plagioclase feldspars are a mineral group not a rock type. (They are the most abundant minerals in the Earth's crust and so widespread that igneous rocks are classified on their precise composition.) "In their natural state, metals are contained in silicate rocks known as ores. To extract them, you need to heat the rocks to the specific temperatures at which the metals melt. They can then pour out of the rock which remains solid". There follows sentences about the element silicon that are equally confused and irrelevant. Native silicon does not exist within the Earth's crust, so its melting point has no significance in the smelting of metals. Technically, some of the first sentence is true (though not his definition of an ore), but the second two are nonsense. Had (archaeo)metallurgy been as simple as he suggests, the Neolithic would have been very short, and mankind would now be extinct or living throughout the Solar System, if not beyond. (The probable sequence might

have been Early Neolithic, couple of really hot bonfires, Iron Age, Nuclear Winter/Alpha Centauri. This, or something similar, has been a plotline for many good sci-fi novels.

Not all is bad. Ironically for an alternative book, the best and clearest chapter is Phillips's competent and succinct debunking of ley lines, especially Wessex ones. However, the very best thing in the book is the 30 or so photographs, often new



views of familiar sites, by Deborah Cartwright. These are fine, atmospheric and excellently reproduced, truly impressive and quite unexpected.

A favourite displacement activity is doing online tests such as 'Are you a psychopath?' (low scores are so disappointing), so somewhere there must be one for authors – 'Are you an alternative archaeologist?' – giving a grid with terms that should be employed and ticked off. Many are obvious, commonplace and long lasting (Atlantis; Mu; the Pyramids; Nazca and ley lines; Machu Picchu (but never Chan Chan; Stonehenge (mandatory); Orion's Belt; solstices; Apollo; the Dogon etc – the list is long and all too familiar), but others are new (Blick Mead, the Hadron Collider, Denisovans) and some are yet to appear (Reich and his DNA work). Alongside are the endless lists of cited experts/authorities. It must be salutatory for 'mainstream' academics that any glow at being named in print in this type of literature is too often tempered by the irritation of being misunderstood, misquoted and intellectually abused. Where is the #MeToo for be-fiddled academics?

*Continued overleaf*



# Stuff of dreams

After a decline in popularity, taxidermy has returned triumphant and at its exuberant best

## Taxidermy

Alexis Turner

Thames and Hudson 2019

Pb, 256pp, illus, gazetteer, ind, £16.95, ISBN 9780500516706

Time was that taxidermy was considered out of date and embarrassing, redolent of decaying 19th century country houses and ‘Great White Hunters’, its specimens out of place in the era of conservation and clean Scandinavian-style interiors. Even the Natural History Museum shunned it from the 1970s to the 1990s, when a systematic redisplay replaced much of their taxidermy with didactic interactive displays.

Times change. Over the last 20 years there has been a transformation in opinion, and taxidermy is back. The Museum’s touring exhibitions, once headlined by animatronic dinosaurs, now lead with imaginative exhibitions with mounted specimens at their heart. Artists, meanwhile, are using taxidermy as a crucial part of their practice, taxidermy courses are thriving, and stuffed animals are the ultimate hipster accessories. There are new, less pungent, methods of preservation, a culture of ethical specimen sourcing and even day courses where you can make your own anthropomorphic mouse mount to take home.

It is this new culture that is predominantly documented in Alexis Turner’s sumptuously illustrated book. A renowned taxidermist himself, Turner is well placed to explore the joys of taxidermy. He gives a brief but thorough overview of its evolution, rise, fall, and resurrection, and then goes on to explore the modern taxidermy scene. There is a look at those museums that still have magnificent

taxidermy displays, from Ipswich Museum, with its lovely restored Victorian natural history gallery, to the American Museum of Natural History, whose dioramas form the pinnacle of classical taxidermy. He explores interiors that use taxidermy as core elements, from Calke Abbey with its time-warped 19th century rooms, to the modern homage to the cabinet of curiosity, Malplaquet House, and adventurous interior designs that show that bright modern homes and taxidermy are not natural enemies. There is an exploration of taxidermy



freaks and fakes (see FT46:51) and a chapter on anthropomorphic taxidermy such as Walter Potter’s delightful (and slightly spooky; see

FT306:36–41) Kitten’s Tea Party, both of which should delight most fortians, as well as one on zoomorphic items like elephant’s foot umbrella stands, which are more of an acquired taste. But where this book shines is in looking at commercial taxidermy and its use in art and fashion. The commercial chapter encompasses both its use in advertising and retail design and the premises of taxidermy dealers, such as the gorgeous Deyrolle shop in Paris, now returned to its former glory after being gutted by fire a decade ago. The art and fashion chapter emphasises how modern taxidermy has leapt into new realms, with artists like Polly Morgan producing works of beauty, and designers like the much-missed Alexander McQueen integrating taxidermy into their collections. Turner’s book is a jewel, enormously satisfying, informative and fascinating, a visual feast attesting to the vibrant renaissance of an art once consigned to the dustbin of history.

Stuart Cooley

★★★★★

Continued from previous page

Though *Wisdomkeepers* and Phillips tick all the alternative archaeology boxes in this literate and gentle read, they fail to deliver on the promise of the title. But that is par for the course.

Rob Ixer

★★★★★

## Dark Emerald Tales

Folklore, Legends, Dark History and Hauntings Of Ireland

Ann Massey O’Regan

Beuk Aithris 2018

Pb, 183pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780995778429

This collection covers the ancient Irish gods and goddesses (the Morrigan, Boann, Aoibhell, Crom Dubh, Lugh); mythical characters such as Oisín and Fionn, and the cycles of their tales; and the harbingers of death (banshees, hellhounds and the dullahan).

The narrative swiftly moves on to the 15th century wizard Earl of Kildare, Gerald Fitzgerald, who studied metallurgy, alchemy and more arcane subjects before returning to Kilkea Castle, where he was eaten by a cat after transforming himself into a bird.

Those with an interest in the fairy realm are well served by short pieces on changelings, fairy shock troops (malevolent spirits sinking boats, fought off with iron), *cait sídhe* (soul-reaping black cat) and, of course, leprechauns. They are descended from the Tuatha Dé Danann and come in 57 different varieties ranging from Leinster (low profile, likes honey) to Ulster (good poet, hurler), Connacht (hardworker, reclusive) and Munster (extrovert, hard drinker). Ghosts, vampires, werewolves and demons all pop up. The werewolves of Ossory were cursed by an abbot but a priest gave one the last rites in 1182, supposedly documented in a 1185 report to Rome. *FT* readers will be keen to learn about Charles Fort in Kinsale and its Lady in White, the ghost of a woman who committed suicide there after finding the corpses of her husband and father. Other haunted sites in Cork include the gaol, St Finbarr’s Hospital and Carr’s Hill Cemetery (ghosts of Famine victims).

If you want a haunted pub in Dublin, you’re spoiled for choice: The Gravediggers (near Glasnevin Cemetery, old haunt of grave robbers); Brogans of Dame St (next to the Olympia, theatrical ghosts); Mulligans of Poolbeg St (frequented by poltergeists); the Lord Edward in Christchurch Place (haunted by the ghost of the United Irishman); and the Brazen Head, which dates to 1198 but is haunted by Robert Emmett.

An entertaining guide to Ireland’s dark side let down by sloppy layout. Still, it should appeal to tourists.

Páirc Ó Corráin

★★★★★

## The Newton Papers

The Strange and True Odyssey of Isaac Newton’s Manuscripts

Sarah Dry

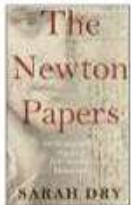
Oxford University Press 2018

Pb, 238pp, illus, notes, ind, £22.99, ISBN 978019093158 2

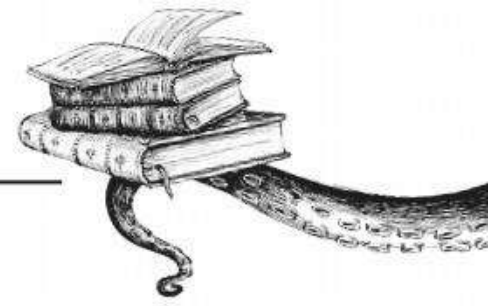
In 1936, Sotheby’s auctioned manuscripts written by Isaac Newton. John Maynard Keynes purchased 38 lots and later collected others bought there by booksellers. In the two centuries since Newton’s death, the few people offered “brief, troubled glimpses” of the manuscripts “worked hard to conceal their contents”, notes Dry.

The auction brought Newton’s ‘hidden’ side into the open. He was prolific: his unpublished work included 1.4 million words on theology and biblical chronology; one million on science; 550,000 on alchemy and related subjects (FT383:66); and 150,000 on coinage and the Mint. Classifying another half-a-million words proved difficult. Scholars realised that the diverse elements were

“intricately interwoven”, linking, for example, natural and magical laws. The manuscripts’ survival was, largely, happenstance. Newton became Master of the Royal Mint in 1699. His government securities and other investments were worth some £2.5 million in today’s currency. Catherine Barton – his housekeeper and the daughter of his half-sister – married John Conduitt. In many ways, we have him to thank for preserving Newton’s manuscripts.







Their daughter married Viscount Lymington, whose son became the 2nd Earl of Portsmouth. The family became the custodians of Newton's manuscripts, which they allowed few to see.

The 5th Earl – the wonderfully named Isaac Newton Wallop – donated the scientific papers to Cambridge University in 1872. (My great-grandfather Isaac Newton Greener, born at the other end of the social scale five years before Wallop's bequest, worked as a turner in Gateshead. Was 'Isaac Newton' an unusual name?) The 9th Earl sold the remaining manuscripts to fund death duties and his divorce.

In this delightful book, Dry introduces a cast of compelling characters, such as the American investor Roger Babson (see FT339:48-50), who made a fortune predicting the Wall Street Crash using an analysis based on Newton's third law of motion. (For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.) Babson credited Isaac, Dry notes, "with providing the basis for his successful business formula". Meanwhile, his wife collected Newton's manuscripts, providing the basis of an important American collection.

When Babson was a boy, his sister died in a swimming accident, which he later blamed on gravity that "came up and seized her like a dragon and brought her to the bottom".

After his grandson also tragically drowned, Babson came to believe gravity was responsible for a "host of ills" including broken bones (an "inability to counteract Gravity at a critical moment"), tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments (gravity, he believed, draws water and air laden with disease into the valleys and houses), and even death by asphyxiation in a fire. Babson's pamphlet *Gravity – Our Enemy No. 1* outlines his case against the fundamental force.

Dry eloquently describes the rise of bibliomania and the resulting rise in prices, especially for first editions. She notes that the Sotheby's auction raised "just over £9,000" – about £330,000 today. In the 1920s, an influential catalogue valued the first edition of *Principia* at £18.18 shillings – about £400 today. In 2016, Christies sold a

first edition for \$3.7 million.

*The Newton Papers* is an insightful and captivating tale of changing intellectual trends, bibliophiles and eccentrics, which will keep you turning the page even if you're not usually drawn to the history of science.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

## 30-Second Forensic Science

**The 50 Key Topics Revealing Criminal Investigation From Behind The Scenes, Each Explained In Half A Minute**

Ivy Press 2018

Hb, 160pp, illus, appxs, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781782405511

This concise and very beautifully illustrated book delivers exactly what the book's title and subtitle promise: a wide-ranging introduction to the current state of play of forensic science, with sidebars of further reading (if the psychology of dismemberment's your bag, Helinä Häkkänen-Nyholm is your woman) and interesting facts (the first post-mortem was Antistius's on Julius Caesar). There are also brief biographies of the leading lights of forensic science, and useful sections on digital records, and the law and science, including bias.

Each section's brevity means that caveats are not addressed: the Phantom of Heilbronn, for instance, goes unmentioned (rather than the serial killer hunted across Europe for 15 years, 'she' was an Austrian woman who worked in a DNA swab-making factory); as does the Scotch Botch case (PC Shirley McKie was eventually exonerated of perjury – though only after her career had been destroyed – in a murder trial when the trial's fingerprint evidence was discredited).

However, that's not what this book is for. Instead, read about forensic botany, which shed light on Ötzi's diet and life; forensic entomology (in 1247, Sung T'su analysed flies attracted to a sickle used for murder); and forensic palynology (pollen and spores).

Terrific stuff, basically, perfect for the profitable age of what's been called "consumer genomics" and for fans of all flavours of *CSI*.

Val Stevenson

★★★★★

## Space Age Indians

**Their Encounters with the Blue Men, Reptilians, and Other Star People**

Ardy Sixkiller Clarke

Anomalist Books 2019

Pb, 239pp, bib, \$17.95, ISBN 9781949501001

Ardy Sixkiller Clarke's UFO books are like no other. Space Age Indians, her fourth, continues to chronicle the experiences of indigenous people, most of them in the American West, where Clarke, emeritus professor at Montana State University, taught over the course of her professional life. (Her second book, *Sky People* [reviewed FT328:58], dealt with encounters reported by Mesoamerican Indians.) As before, Dr Clarke is a collector of oral testimony, neither an analytic folklorist nor an investigative ufologist. In fact, since her books focus on direct experiences more than hoary traditions, "folklore" is not what they are about.

Her methodology is to sit with someone who says he or she has had an extraordinary experience, turn on a tape recorder, and insert the occasional question. The informant remains anonymous, as does their precise location.

Those inclined to dismiss the stories as the fancies of a culture that embraces a magical Universe should consider that the witnesses, usually reservation dwellers, fear ridicule from their fellow Indians, evidently as reflexively sceptical as their white neighbours.

A product of Reservation life, and with a personality that puts wary persons at ease, Clarke moves easily through the culture and finds her way to a broad range of informants – cowboys, veterans, students, cops, pilots, scientists, medical professionals and ordinary folk – to harvest a lot of high strangeness. Much of it involves abductions in which little grey men appear, but only as secondary players. Giant bipedal reptiles and insectoids, frighteningly devoid of good will, are most prominent. On the other side, oversized, benign 'Blue Men' watch over soldiers and sometimes transfer the dead and wounded to their home world to

resume life there. They occasionally heal civilians. And here and there, the aliens shift their shapes.

Informants occasionally talk of associated physical evidence, sometimes landing traces, sometimes scars on their persons. Once in a while Clarke sees the alleged evidence, and she has experienced close-up sightings of puzzling lights and objects. Without her efforts, none of this would be available: American Indians have no reason to hand their secrets to

white investigators who may blunder onto the reservation demanding stories and evidence.

If you're horrified that people report extraordinary encounters or believe that the proper response to such

testimony is mockery, Clarke's books are not for you.

I have no problem with the notion that, as she insists, her informants are neither insane nor insincere. To me an experiential claim's content, however bizarre, is not the problem; it's the larger epistemological issue of the encounter's true nature and meaning, a dilemma we're probably far from untangling. I doubt, too, that careless application of the adjective "psychological" gets us anywhere. A number of the reported occurrences are attached to multiple-witness testimony.

In common with her informants, Clarke judges these to be encounters with extraterrestrial visitors. From my perspective, there's no way to make a compelling argument one way or another. I remain contentedly agnostic but am always pleased to read whatever she has to offer.

Jerome Clark

★★★★★





# Provisional 1970s realities

McKenna, Wilson and Dick, visionaries of the ‘un-decade’, help us understand the occult architecture that may underpin the digital ‘real’

## High Weirdness

**Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies**

Erik Davis

Strange Attractor Press 2019

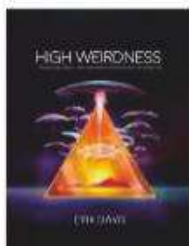
Hb, 544pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £27.00, ISBN 9781907222764

Erik Davis’s *High Weirdness* is more than a close reading of three titans of reality testing (Terence McKenna, Robert Anton Wilson and Philip K Dick) as the ‘undecade’ of the 1970s is dissected, exposing a web of psychic, political and cultural rupture. It posits a modality (“high weirdness”) that condenses the countercultural fodder of the decade – drugs, magic, UFOs, pornography, and Eastern and Western mysticism – into a singular discourse. It’s fascinating stuff, made more so by Davis’s intertwining of such 70s American narratives as Vietnam, Watergate, MK Ultra and the emergence of a paranoid ‘Me Generation’.

Davis focuses upon a key epiphanic moment in each of the subjects’ lives. For Terence and Dennis McKenna, it is the ‘La Chorrera’ experiment of 1971 in which the brothers, deep in the Colombian rainforest, sought enlightenment through the hallucinogen DMT. Terence sought a model of civil society through which psychedelics could bring about positive change. Davis considers the “weird naturalism” suggested by their exploration of the “trans-dimensional doorways” they passed through as they stepped up their experimentation with magic mushrooms and exotic botanicals became more intense. Davis demonstrates his scholarly acumen in linking adolescent science fiction fantasies to their quest for an eschatological Philosopher’s Stone and encounters with DMT ‘machine elves’.

Robert Anton Wilson, best known for the *Illuminatus!*

trilogy (1975, co-written with Robert Shea), is more representative of the radical American nonconformism of the 70s. He embodies the archetypal ‘wise guy’ and the professional prankster. His universe is populated by the Bavarian Illuminati, paranoid visions of Deep Government, psychedelic revelations, UFOs and ritual



magic: a fugue state of chaos, power and psychic sleight of hand. Wilson’s Catholicism, Marxism and exposure to LSD fed into his Promethean ambitions to break through the all encompassing ‘metaprogramming’ we endure to become a ‘hedonic engineer’.

Between July 1973 and October 1974, Wilson believed he was in telepathic communication with the Sirius star system. His early role as a High Priest of Discordianism, a satirical pseudo-religion of chaos and comedy, led him to more strident liminal experiences. Davis considers Wilson’s *Cosmic Trigger: Final Secret of the Illuminati* (1977) as a fundamental text in ‘freak’ epistemology. Wilson saw the Sirius transmissions as a manifesto for change and the culmination of his earlier ‘Operation Mindfuck’ experiments into “culture jamming” and “guerrilla ontology”. As America searched its soul over Watergate and its thirst for oil, Wilson offered answers in the form of provisional reality and an acceptance of cognitive dissonance.

Davis’s appraisal of Philip K Dick, his final subject, demonstrates his fine eye for social and historical detail as he documents the origin and import of the monumentally ‘weird’ *Exegesis* in Dick’s inner cosmography. Taking account of the familiar aspects of Dick’s early life and his drugs use, Davis concentrates on the bizarre events of 2.3.74, the day

on which Dick ‘remembered’ his previous incarnations as an early Christian. The *Exegesis* is Dick’s philosophical meditation upon the nature of reality and the possibilities of redemption, triggered by the chance reflection of sunlight from a Christian medallion into his eye as he took delivery of his medication! As he penetrated enfolded dimensions of signs and symbols that mapped Christ’s Jerusalem onto California and found himself the recipient of information overload as a mysterious pink light beam blew his mind, Davis suggests that Dick’s life is redolent with “sacred possibility”. Predated by the Gnostic ideas in novels such as *Ubik* (1969) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), *Exegesis* marks the moment of religious conversion for Dick, Davis implies, as he consolidates his ideas of the Demiurge being abroad in the world, 2.3.74 represents Dick’s “eschatological trigger”. As text, Davis argues, *Exegesis* and its accompanying *Tractates*, is a high point in American ‘weirdness’ and one that offers an insight into a unique talent searching to integrate early life experiences and spiritual aspiration into a coherent philosophical system. The extent to which *Exegesis* represents a haunted subjectivity and the source for further forays into ‘the reality field’ with the *VALIS* trilogy of 1981–82 concludes Davis’s stunning evaluation of a true spiritual frontiersman.

Concluding with a meditation on the role of our visionaries in our understanding of interconnectedness and the occult architecture that may underpin our digital ‘real’, Davis has produced a work of monumental value to readers in the field of cultural history, psychedelic studies and philosophy.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

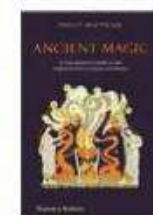
## Ancient Magic

**A Practitioner’s Guide to the Supernatural in Greece and Rome**

Philip Matyszak

Thames & Hudson 2019

Pb, 208pp, illus, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9780500052075



In *Ancient Magic*, Philip Matyszak, the author of several somewhat gimmicky popular histories, including *24 Hours in Ancient Rome* and *Legionary: The Roman Soldier’s (Unofficial) Manual*, turns his attention to the spells and rituals of Ancient Greece and Rome.

Written in the author’s trademark colloquial manner, Matyszak provides a simple – even simplistic – overview of a complex subject. Given the book’s brevity and its copious illustrations (a highlight, actually), the author, who appears to be a thorough enough researcher, could be excused for his breezy treatment of Hellenic superstitions, prophecies, love potions, resurrections of the dead and much else besides, and the myths and legends from which they derive. The literature is replete with similar-length catalogues that are comparative masterpieces of density, compression and intellectual sophistication. That is not to say that there isn’t room for yet another text that popularises and decontextualises (and therefore simplifies and normalises) history, and in so doing treats matters of great import as though they were an off-colour joke or the latest episode of some exotic soap opera. Yet this is often achieved at the cost of a more fascinating strangeness of the past, its remoteness and otherworldliness. The real magic is found in details that always seem to fall by the wayside when addressed in such a casual manner.

Judged by its own merits, *Ancient Magic* is an amusing volume, yet there are other, far more comprehensive and serious treatments within reach. Matyszak’s is an adequate book to give to a young reader if they show an interest in the subject. The better read and more serious among us are probably better off avoiding it.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★



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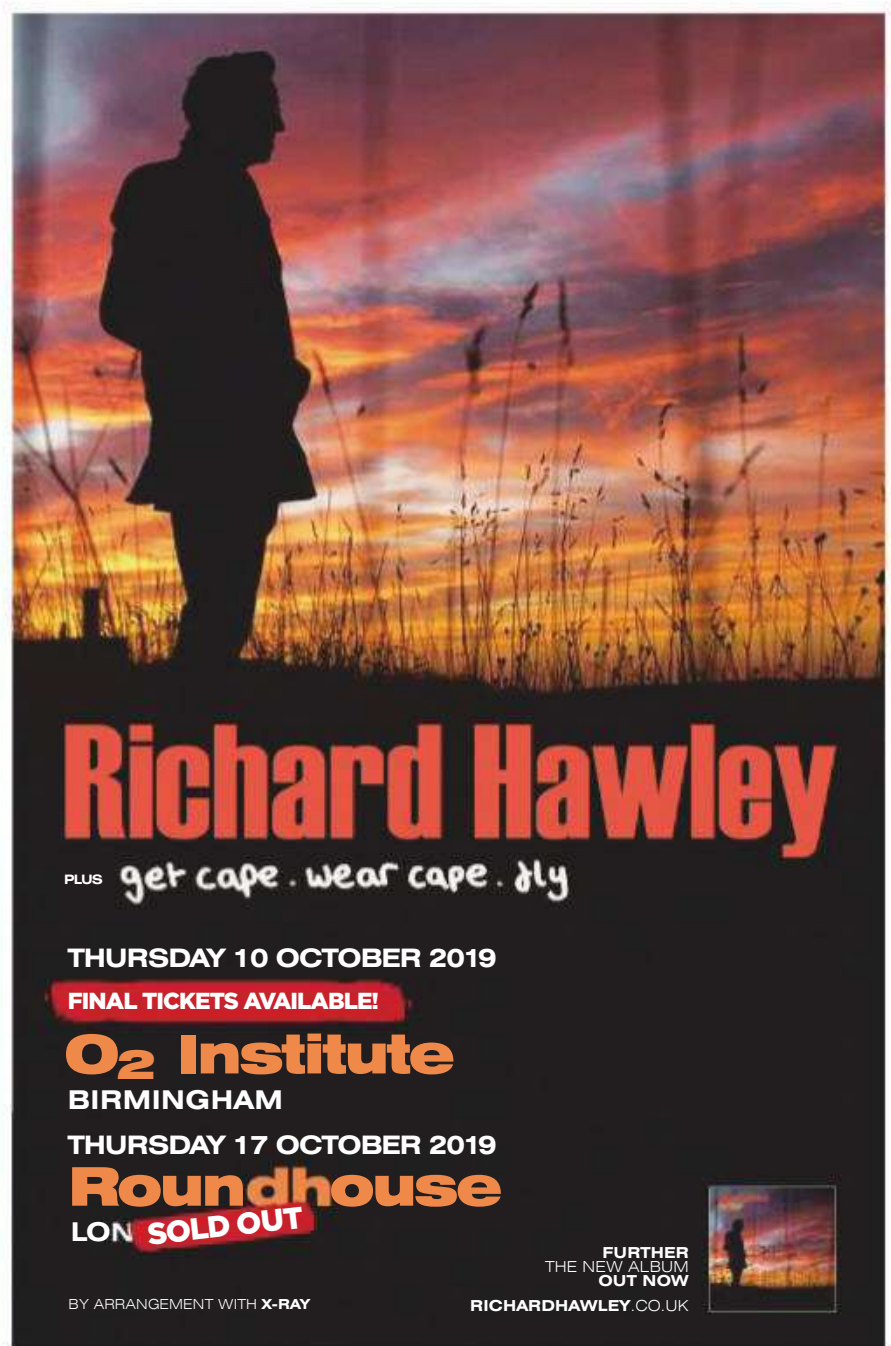
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## Here comes the bride...

An amusing horror romp, *Ready or Not* delivers dark comedy and blood-spattered suspense in its story of a newly married bride fighting to survive her husband's murderous family



### Ready or Not

Dir Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett, US 2019  
On UK release

Surprising as it may be to some, horror and comedy have significant commonalities as both genres must employ the same core elements in order to succeed. Both genres rely heavily on build-up and timing, which are essential to achieve their desired effects on audiences, be it evoking terror with a horror film or laughter in response to a comedy.

Given that, the hybrid known as the 'horror comedy' has proved its merit many times over; whether it's the comedy or the horror that takes the driver's seat, the two genres often enhance one another when combined. While calling *Ready or Not* a horror comedy would be underselling just how suspenseful – and gory – it is, the film nonetheless benefits tremendously from its tongue-in-cheek attitude.

Pulling no punches with its visceral approach to horror, the film is a fun, blood-soaked watch with a delightfully deranged premise at its centre. Being fully aware of how maniacal its premise is, *Ready or Not*

### Grace must navigate an eerie mansion full of secret passages

knowingly and joyfully pokes fun at the whodunnit genre and supernatural horror films without becoming exactly a spoof of either.

There is not much mystery surrounding the plot in terms of the classic whodunnit structure of figuring out who the main antagonist is, since almost the entire Le Domas family are antagonists: it's a case of everyone in every room with every conceivable weapon against newlywed protagonist Grace (Samara Weaving). There is, however, an increasing sense of mystery about exactly *what* is motivating the family's perverse shenanigans, and as the plot unfolds, it all becomes increasingly outlandish.

While this mostly works in the film's favour, the plot twists are hardly jaw-dropping. Thankfully, the plot is not the main selling point, the emphasis being on

creating suspense rather than trying to dazzle audiences with clever bait-and-switch devices. As the proceedings escalate into increasingly grimmer, gorier territory, the suspense largely maintains its momentum as Grace must navigate an eerie, unfamiliar mansion filled with all the secret passages, hiding places and shocking discoveries that are mandatory in such a setting.

Delivering a compelling performance, Samara Weaving makes it easy to invest in her character as she goes through seemingly endless ordeals in her fight to stay alive as the bride married into a fantastically wealthy but utterly insane family. Portraying an understandably frantic character, she nonetheless remains relatable and credible. This is largely thanks to the wit woven through her panicked performance, in which she continuously verbalises what the audience is thinking and does the things the audience so often wish horror protagonists *would* do.

Adam Brody's trademark sarcasm also proves to be a good fit for the tone of the film, as does the self-awareness demonstrated by the other characters, which lends a comedic quality to the

various members of the Le Domas family, whether expressed in the form of amused aloofness, snarky wit or cartoonish expressions of villainy. All of this helps maintain a playful tone as the film becomes increasingly gruesome and blood-soaked. This isn't just gore for gore's sake, and the humorous approach to the twisted hunt for the protagonist ensures that *Ready or Not* avoids the tiresome territory of torture porn.

While it's a fairly disposable film, in that the simplicity of its premise leaves little to be explored on repeat viewings, *Ready or Not* is nonetheless an amusing romp that will entertain most horror fans. A wittier gore-fest than most, *Ready or Not* has decently executed, explicit deaths and injuries, but what truly makes the film worthwhile is its dark humour and the blood-spattered explosive finale.

Leyla Mikkelsen



### The White Reindeer

Dir Erik Blomberg, Finland 1952  
Eureka, £14.99 (dual format)

One of the most internationally acclaimed Finnish films, and almost certainly the greatest Finnish horror film, *The White Reindeer* is a must-see for any serious cinephile. Set among the Sámi people of Lapland, it draws on their folkloric tradition, if not on any specific folk tale, in telling the story of Pirita (the luminous Mirjami Kuosmanen), a happily married woman who nevertheless terribly misses her husband Aslak when he is gone for weeks at a time reindeer-herding. Pirita enlists the aid of a shaman, wanting to become more desirable to her husband, but the rite goes wrong, so to speak, and she becomes a shape-shifting vampire.

The phrase 'folk horror' gets bandied around far too much





these days, often by people who have seen *The Wicker Man* and not much else and insist on using spellings like ‘magick’ and ‘wyrd’. Having said that, the phrase does have some application and it seems to me that *The White Reindeer* is a good example: it has a deep connection to a particular cultural identity and to a specific location, and it has a strong paganistic element (as inhabitants of one of the last European areas to convert to Christianity, paganism was present in Sami culture until relatively recently). The ‘horror’, such as it is, rises out of this combination of culture, location and belief system and is therefore unique to it.

That said, folklore being what it is, there is enough in *The White Reindeer* to render it recognisable to other cultures, which is one of the reasons why the film did so well internationally, indeed winning a prize at the 1953 Cannes Film Festival. For instance, many cultures are familiar with depictions of a blood-drinking creature, or a shape-shifting beast, or witches.

More than that though, the film works because it is a fine production. Lapland is a starkly beautiful place that is naturally extremely photogenic. The way the camera captures not only the magical glistening snow but also its fearsome life-stealing properties is quite superb, offering the viewer some startling images, none better than Pirita’s return to the shaman only to find his shack buried in a drift. Kuosmanen, who was married at the time to director Blomberg, and also wrote the script with him, is simply marvellous as Pirita: going from playfully innocent, to head over heels in love, to desperate, to terrifying and then pitiful is quite a challenge, particularly with very little dialogue, but it’s one of the great performances in genre cinema.

This dual format edition comes with several good extras, including a full length audio commentary, an audio essay about the depiction of witches in Nordic cinema, and most tantalising of all, a brief minute’s worth of colour test footage which indicates what colour can bring to and detract from an image.

Daniel King



## THE REVEREND’S REVIEW

FT’s resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com))

### Borley Rectory

Dir Ashley Thorpe, UK 2017  
Nucleus Films, £18.99 (Blu-ray)

Filming live actors in black and white, surrounded by green screen animation, sounded like a risky way to tell such a famous forteen story – but gosh, it works. After years of insanely detailed production from Ashley Thorpe, there’s a weird sorcery to his film, *Borley Rectory*. I’ve seen it three times now, mainly because it feels like a virtual reality experience, with viewers spirited off their sofas, and gently (and sometimes not so gently) beckoned into the ‘most haunted house in England’.

Thorpe could have made a straight documentary or a by-the-numbers ghost movie. Instead, he fuses those two approaches. The result is unique, and you really have to see it to understand. Let’s just say it’s beautiful, lyrical, eccentric and, yes, pretty damn scary at times. It is filmed as if it had been made in the 1930s: so there are no quick zooms or frantic editing so beloved of modern horror. Instead, we get long shots of shadowy doorways, while candles flicker and windowpanes rattle. You’re



*What a stroke of genius to evoke that feeling so well in a film!*



left in an almost constant state of dread. The sound design is particularly strong. Watching through my surround system at home, I kept glancing up at the ceiling, or turning to the door.

Julian Sands lends the film a regal depth as the narrator, while Jonathon Rigby and Reece Shearsmith (playing Harry Price and *Daily Mirror* journalist V C Wall respectively) bring a spooky eccentricity to it all.

Nucleus Films have provided a pretty astonishing slate of extras too, with over six hours of bonus material on the Blu-ray release. Yes, there are documentaries on the history of Borley and the making of the film, but also on the *Usborne Book of Ghosts* that inspired the enterprise [see p32 for more about that], and an insightful conversation with *Ghostwatch* creator Stephen Volk, on the enduring appeal of the supernatural. It’s like the good old days, when ‘Special Edition’ DVDs really did feel special – there’s even a hidden Easter Egg for the eagle-eyed to spot.

When I first heard of a new film telling the story of Borley Rectory, I was excited. Yet I must admit that when I first heard it was an animated film I was also confused and slightly apprehensive, imagining a cartoon Harry Price belting out Disney-style calypso tunes about a long-dead nun ‘Under the House!’ Yet Thorpe’s animation is so subtle and natural that the film doesn’t ‘feel’ animated. What it does feel however, is *haunted*. The effect is like the ‘uncanny valley’ you experience with robots, when they’re just shy of human. Thorpe’s bold and slightly mad vision presents a country house that looks quite normal, and yet isn’t normal at all. What a stroke of genius to evoke that feeling so well in a film!

After all, for ghost fans, *Borley Rectory* has always existed in that borderline between myth and reality.



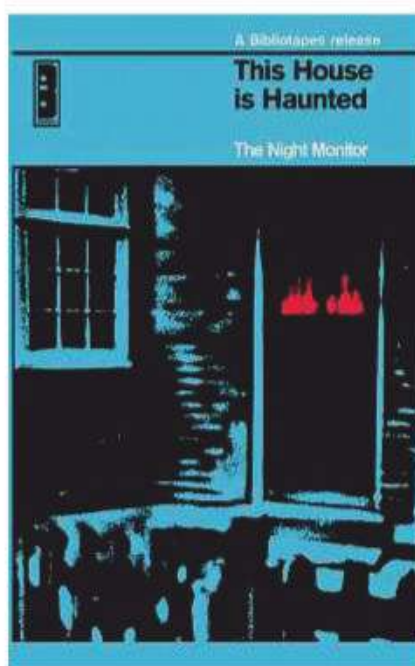
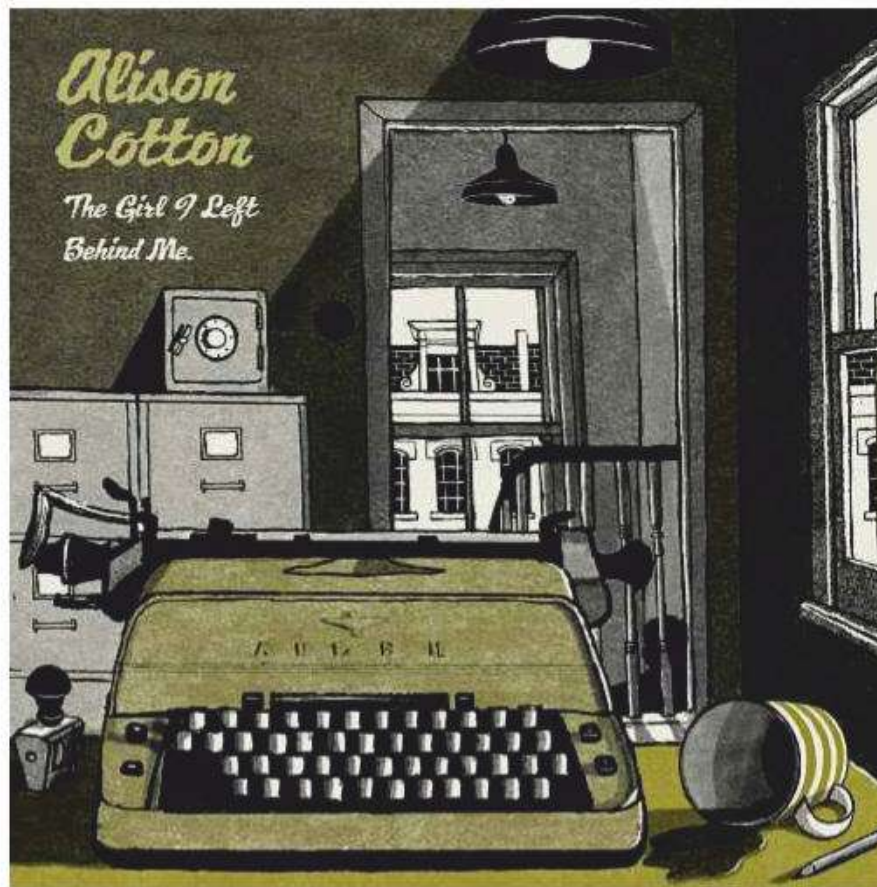
# THE HAUNTED GENERATION

## BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"In 'The Girl I Left Behind Me', the narrator tells her story from the grave," says Alison Cotton, discussing Muriel Spark's 1957 short story, the inspiration for her new album of the same title. "The story is about a girl who works in a London office, her first job after a long illness. As she leaves work one evening, she is struck by a strong conviction that she has left something important at the office, but can't work out what it can be..."

The opening side of this beautiful 10" vinyl release was originally commissioned and recorded for Gideon Coe's BBC 6 Music Show in 2018, to accompany a Christmas reading of the story itself, by actress Bronwen Price. A single, 13-minute suite for melancholy viola captures perfectly the downbeat, rain-soaked ambience of austerity-era London, underpinned by a fluttering murmur of dread that escalates as the narrative speeds towards its chilling conclusion. "As I was playing, I imagined myself as the main character of the story," continues Alison. "I composed an eerie melody, following the structure of the story, and building up the suspense with my wordless singing..."

The flipside is inspired by a later Spark tale, 1966's 'The House of the Famous Poet', and Alison's ethereal vocals feature even more prominently here, amidst a wash of drone-like omnichord, and an elegant, spiralling viola recital recorded, impressively, in a single, improvised take. Set in wartime London, the story is the surreal tale of an "abstract funeral" sold to the narrator by a mysterious soldier that she meets on a delayed night-train journey from Edinburgh: "An aspect which fascinated me," admits Alison, going on to enthuse further about her recent discovery of some of Spark's lesser-known stories. "I'd only read *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, which I



remember I enjoyed when I was younger," she says, "but I bought her collection of ghost stories. I thought they were all so well-written and chilling... and I loved how they were mostly written from the ghost's perspective."

*The Girl I Left Behind Me* is released by Clay Pipe music on (of course) Hallowe'en, the second of two releases in quick succession from this beautifully consistent label. The other is Vic Mars's *Inner Roads and Outer Paths*, an album influenced by the writing and photography of

Herefordshire ley pioneer Alfred Watkins and by Vic's own childhood explorations of the county's various abandoned houses and factories. Gently-plucked guitars, shimmering strings and woozy, old-school synths evoke an emotional connection to the British countryside... think Ralph Vaughan Williams with a Korg Monopoly. Both albums are available on vinyl and as downloads from [claypipemusic.co.uk](http://claypipemusic.co.uk).

Also taking inspiration from a classic spooky text is Neil Scrivin, whose album *This House Is Haunted*, released under his new nom-de-plume of The Night Monitor, provides an eerie radiophonic soundtrack to Guy Lyon Playfair's famous late 1970s account of his investigations into the notorious Enfield Poltergeist. The album is strong on verisimilitude: there are knockings, white noise and tantalisingly indecipherable hints of electronic voice phenomena, amidst slabs of atmospheric music concrète that *Doctor Who* fans will find deliciously reminiscent of Roger Limb's percussive, synth-drive compositions for the

show. A limited-edition cassette release on the Bibliotapes label will be followed by a digital download. Head to [bibliotapes.co.uk](http://bibliotapes.co.uk), [soundcloud.com/thenightmonitor](http://soundcloud.com/thenightmonitor), or follow @TheNightMonitor on Twitter.

Meanwhile, irrepressible composer and "sound archaeologist" Drew Mulholland has used his 20-year-old field recordings, recorded onto old-school magnetic tape at locations used in the filming of *The Wicker Man*, as the basis for *The Wicker Tapes*, a delightfully left-field sound collage. "There was still about five feet of each leg, both set into a concrete base with 'WM 73' carved into it", recalls Drew of his 2002 visit to Burrowhead in Dumfries and Galloway. A very limited release in August saw each cassette coming with a sliver of wood from the remains of this legendary prop, which also played a major role in the sound manipulations that shaped the album. "I built a Heath Robinson device that allowed the tape essentially to be destroyed by an actual piece of the Wicker Man," he continues. "After that I set the wood alight, and – when cooled – crushed it to ash and coated the near-destroyed tape with it."

The results are an album of dark, disquieting ambience, peppered with fleeting, folkly motifs that evoke disturbing images of the film's own climactic and merciless procession. Although the original cassette immediately sold out, the album is available for digital download from [drewmulholland.bandcamp.com/track/the-wicker-tapes](http://drewmulholland.bandcamp.com/track/the-wicker-tapes).

Visit the new Haunted Generation website at [hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://hauntedgeneration.co.uk), send details of new releases, or memories of the original 'haunted' era to [hauntedgeneration@gmail.com](mailto:hauntedgeneration@gmail.com), or find me on Twitter @bob\_fischer



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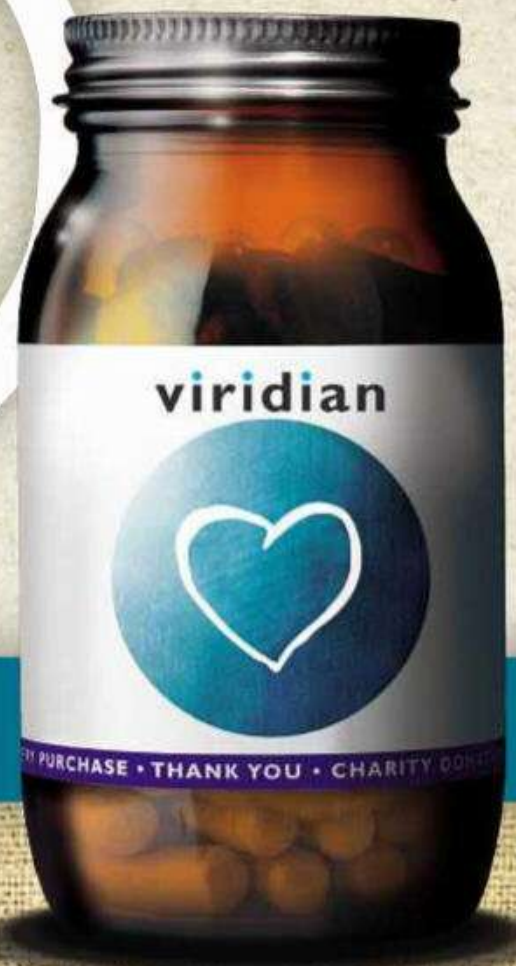
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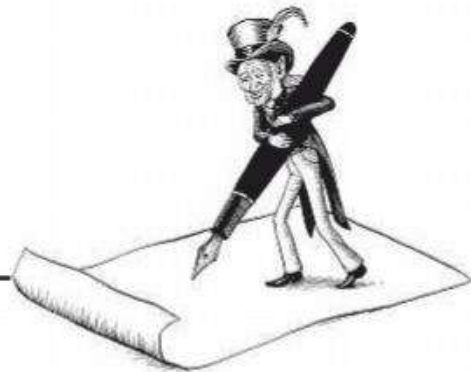
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# LETTERS

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## Helter Skelter

Contrary to what is perceived and known about Charles Manson [FT383:34-40], there are extant at least two books worth mentioning that refute the Helter Skelter, race-war scenario, that prosecuting attorney Vincent Bugliosi told the court was the reason behind the Tate-LaBianca murders: *Now's The Only Thing That's Real* by Neil Sanders and *Chaos* by Tom O'Neill. Incidentally, in the 1980s, Manson's ideas were behind an ideological concept called Universal Order, founded by James N Mason, an American national-socialist – not another neo-Nazi group, but a focus to dropping out of society inspired by Manson's living off-grid and later the ATWA (Air, Trees, Water, Animals) group.

**RT Knight**

*By email*

In the same week that FT383 was sent out to subscribers with the headline 'Helter Skelter' in the well-known Charles Manson reference, the installation of a real helter skelter in Norwich Cathedral hit the UK's national headlines. It's a bit ironic that one has satanic overtones ('The Devil's Business' title of James Riley's FT article) while the other is in a 'place of God'.

**Rob Gandy**

*By email*

## One soul

I was very sad, not just in a conventional sense, to read of the death of Nils Erik Grande [FT383:2]. I say without hyperbole that he was one of the reasons I read *Fortean Times*. I very much appreciated his open-mindedness and originality. I have incorporated some of his ideas into my own thinking, especially his exposition of the "one soul" theory, which I found explains a range of theological problems at a stroke. I hope he will be discovering the correctness of his suggestion that a soul leaving one body can re-enter another at any time or place, past, present or future, and that there is ultimately only one abiding consciousness threading through all human lives so that we are all

## SIMULACRA CORNER



Scott Wilson photographed the Kingarth standing stones on the island of Bute in Scotland in 2017. He commented: "I used to be an archaeologist and I've visited many megalithic sites, but I've always found the Kingarth stones to be particularly eerie, maybe because they're within dark woods. They always give me a Folk Horror-esque feeling of dread when I visit them. However, I had never really noticed these faces in the stones until I reviewed my album today."

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.*

each other, just born into different bodies and exposed to different hormones, circumstances and life experiences.

**Marc Widdowson**

*Hanthorpe, Lincolnshire*

## Pun intended

Excellent article on the European Union [FT383:52-55] – but according to *Diplomat* magazine, the Henry Wotton quotation (p.55) reads: "An ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country." In his day

(1568–1639), "lie" also meant "stay overnight". (Richard III: "Put my tent up! I'll lie here tonight.") Wotton's pun was intended.

**Lucy Fisher**

*FLM Partners Proofreading and Editing*

## Norfolk tall tale

Further to Matt Salusbury's interesting Forum piece 'A Roman Caracal in Norfolk' [FT382:54-55], the notion of big cats in Norfolk brought over by the Romans for games was already present in lo-

cal pseudo-folklore.

At the end of the first chapter of *Ghosts of the Broads* (1931), Charles Sampson states: "According to Day's *Chronicles of East Anglia*, 1825, the royal progress of Carausius, the founder of the Royal Mint in London complete with lions and prisoners comes down what is still the village street in Wroxham on its way from Brancaster, the Roman fortress and citadel which defended the Wash". Sampson claims the ghost of Carausius haunts Wroxham Broad with accompanying spectres.

Sampson regales readers with a large-scale time-slip experience at Wroxham Broad claimed to exist in an account written from 1829 which included (along with a number of apparitions) "twelve full-grown lions on golden chains led by warriors in gilt armour carrying glittering halberds."

To say that the stories contained in *Ghosts of the Broads* (uncritically repeated in far too many books in the years since) should be seen as far-fetched is putting it mildly. The whole book was devastatingly dissected by Michael Burgess of Lowestoft for *Lantern* magazine #37 in spring 1982 in an article entitled 'Hoax of the Broads'. Suffice it to say that much of the information contained between its covers was imagined by Sampson, including the bulk of its claimed sources and references.

Burgess established that while there was a Marcus Aurelius Valerius Carausius, who seized control of Britain in AD 286 and his third name may have been Mauseus, much of the rest of the information given is inaccurate, unprovable or simply false. Burgess thought that there might be a vague tradition of ghostly Romans in Norfolk existing independently of Sampson, but found nothing about them having big cats. Still, it remains a nice literary coincidence that Sampson would place his dozen ghostly lions a relatively short distance from where the first evidence of Roman big cats has now emerged.

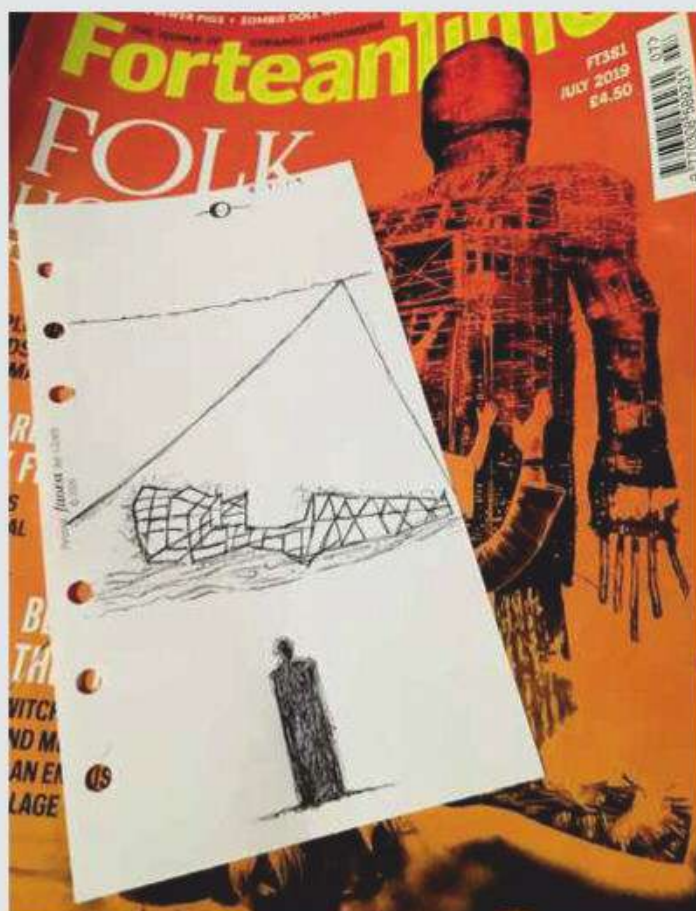
**Alan Murdie**

*Bournemouth, Dorset*



## Wicker Man Dream

My husband Pete is currently keeping a dream diary. In this he does small drawings rather than writing the dream down. He has done this spasmodically for years. I bought my copy of *Fortean Times* #381 on 8 August; he doesn't read the magazine or look at it. On 9 August he woke up and did this drawing, which he described as a 'Wicker Man' with a square section cut out of his chest. He remarked on the strangeness of his dream, which he couldn't account for. We were both amazed by the fact I could reach to my side of the bed and show him the FT cover with the image of the Wicker Man. He knows



the film but hasn't seen it for years. In the same issue was 'The Dream Quest of Steve Moore' by Bob Rickard (pp.54-

55), which further reinforced the strangeness factor.

• On another tack regarding the report about tiny space-men being missed as too small to make an impact (Sideline, p.11): I recall a late-night TV programme of the 1960s, which had a different storyline each week. I cannot recall the name of this series but one episode was exactly this with communication set up with aliens on a spacecraft trying to land. They are swallowed in a vast sea-like swamp of monsters: a pud-

dle of worms.

Or did I dream this...?

**Mary Worrall**  
London

crashed and the 14 fatalities were all adults.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1935/12/23/archives/14-die-as-bus-plunges-into-river-none-saved-in-virginia-accident.html>

**Mark Graham**

By email

## Time travel music

May I appeal for opinions on the music heard by Miss Eleanor Jourdain at the Petit Trianon in 1902 as a sequel to her 'Adventure' of 1901?

Some background for those unfamiliar with the case [for a full account, see **FT278:30-35**]: Miss Eleanor Jourdain and Miss Charlotte Moberly (respectively Vice Principal and Principal of St Hugh's Hall, Oxford University) had a most curious experience in the grounds of the Petit Trianon, Versailles, in August 1901, described in their book *An Adventure*, which went through five editions and was somewhat of a *cause célèbre* and item of debate, down to the present. Ostensibly, they wandered into a 'time slip' in which they became lost in the gardens at the time of Marie Antoinette. They met and conversed with various strangely dressed people with odd French accents, and passed various architectural and landscape features and tableaux, culminating in them passing the Queen herself.

However, when Miss Jourdain returned to Versailles in January 1902, she found everything had changed – she could not retrace their path, the layout was different, architecture had disappeared and everything seemed much smaller. She heard a distant snatch of eerie music, faint and intermittent, as from a string band; however, the authorities told her that no band had been playing that day. Subsequent research, although unable to definitively identify the piece, confirmed to her satisfaction that it was in the idiom of the time of Marie Antoinette. Strangely, the score of this music was not published in any of the five editions of *An Adventure*.

Having recently bought a rare 1966 booklet, *The Music of An Adventure* by Ian Parrot, which does

## Tiny astronauts

I was thinking about CRISPR and its use to create new kinds of humans. First, mermen who could live at sea and then astronauts who would not suffer the ills of weightlessness. Right now, we pick full size test pilots but if we were designing, doesn't it make sense to create the smallest people? In space, you don't need size and strength and the smaller the size, the smaller the resources of all kinds needed. It just makes sense to send tiny astronauts, if you have a choice.

**Hugh Henry**  
By email

## Hot and cold

I read with amusement the Mythconception about putting hot food in the fridge [**FT382:27**]. I believe the story behind this idea goes back to when iceboxes had large blocks of ice in them to keep items cold. If one put a hot item in there, the block of ice would melt faster and affect the inner tempera-

ture. I remember my mother telling my grandmother (born in 1908) not to let items sit on the kitchen counter before putting them in the fridge.

**Janet Nickerson**  
By email

## Spooked by Joyce

Mervyn Gale's spotting of prescient Beatles lyrics in a 1919 Nijinsky poem [**FT383:73**] reminds me of an occurrence of several such. In about 1966 I purchased a copy of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, partly because I had long enjoyed performing the ballad of resurrection he drew his title from, and partly because I had already read and admired his *Ulysses*. I also bought a crib explaining elements of *Finnegan's Wake*, but did my best to interpret what I could for myself. I found that I did best if I read the text aloud in a cod Dublin accent, and was pleased when I recognised that in a page asking a complex double-barrelled question, the correct answer was the same as

for all important questions – 'Yes and No'. Then about two-fifths through the book I recognised that a page was seeded with at least 10 Beatles song titles or lyric quotes. Then I recalled that Joyce had published his *Wake* in 1939 and that his stated aim was to include within the *Wake* all future literature as well as all past literature.

Spooked, I gave the *Wake* and crib away.

**Ewan McVicar**  
Linlithgow, West Lothian

## Hopewell bus tragedy

Much as I enjoyed David Thrusel's piece on Red River Dave McEnery [**FT383:44-47**], his description of the 1935 Hopewell bus tragedy in Virginia is somewhat inaccurate. The article states that "a school bus crashed into the river..." and "Moved by the scores of drowned children, McEnery picked up his pen". In fact it was a Greyhound bus from Richmond to Raleigh that





contain the score, I have been able to programme a synthesiser with it, and thus it can be heard for the first time at <http://www.xenophon.org.uk/music.html>. It is indeed strangely haunting. The point that caused the greatest controversy was Miss Jourdain's statement that "it was in a lower pitch than modern pitch". It being known that 18th century concert pitch was lower than that of today, her critics alleged she knew this and said it to strengthen her 'proof'.

Some musicologists' opinion was that it was a nonsensical statement anyway, and that it was impossible to say what the pitch was of an unknown piece of music, heard in an unknown key. Concert pitch in 1901 would have been A4 = 439Hz, and in the 18th century 422 Hz; not quite a semitone lower. Ostensibly, dropping the pitch by a semitone should sound the same as lowering the key by a semitone, but Parrot argues that, at least for stringed instruments, it does sound different; though how this affects the argument that the original key was unknown is obscure.

It was either a genuine psychological experience; a real band; or an auditory hallucination constructed by her unconscious, either from a forgotten memory or from scratch. If the latter, it is somewhat surprising that music in coherent harmony was produced.

So may I ask – was it a nonsensical statement, and can anyone identify the music please?

**Roger J Morgan**  
London

## Species

Species certainly aren't a myth (Mythconceptions, **FT382:27**). Species are simply a framework that biologists use to impose order on the natural world. So, while they exist, the beauty of a definition is in the eye of the beholder. And defining species is a complex and complicated task that taxes the minds of biologists and often causes considerable controversy. I recall from my taxonomy practicals that it's a very tough task, often depending on subtle and nuanced differences.

So, this is a rather simplified summary.

Essentially, the biological definition holds that species resemble each other – species means semblance – interbreed, producing fertile offspring, and are reproductively isolated from other groups. As a rule of thumb, species don't interbreed – exchange genes – with each other in the wild even if they can.

Initially, a barrier – such as a mountain range, water or behaviour – can lead to a group that looks or acts differently (a race or subspecies) but that could interbreed. Over time, these subspecies can evolve into a distinct species. But this biological definition is flawed: some species can interbreed and produce fertile offspring, for instance.

Ring species – a number of neighbouring populations of intermediate forms that can interbreed, but with at least two populations at each 'end' that are distant enough to prevent interbreeding – pose another difficulty.

There are other definitions. Phylogenetic species share unique evolutionary history manifest in their genes. This tends to result in lots of small species that seem similar at first sight. These fascinate biologists and have led to unprecedented understanding of the diversity of the natural world. But I suspect this form of division may leave some non-biologists scratching their heads to see the difference between supposedly distinct forms.

Typological (phenotypic) species share similar characteristics: so members of a species look the same. This is the classic way of separating species used by Victorian natural historians, for example. But, in my view, while it's a valuable first step, it's been generally replaced by biological and phylogenetic definitions.

So yes, species exist. But it's a far more complex and controversial area than you might expect.

**Mark Greener**  
By email

There are of course no such things as species in nature, irrespective of biology's current definition. It is a purely human and culturally defined concept. As fortians, we should follow the master and be aware that the concept of species has its worth for the sake of convenience. As Charles Fort has it in chapter three of *The Book of the Damned*: "In Continuity, it is impossible to distinguish phenomena at their merging-points, so we look for them at their extremes. Impossible to distinguish between animal and vegetable in some infusoria – but hippopotamus and violet. For all practical purposes they're distinguishable enough. No one but a Barnum or a Bailey would send one a bunch of hippopotami as a token of regard."

**Ulrich Magin**  
Hennef, North Rhine-Westphalia



Species do exist; the problem is that no one is certain what they are! Frank Zarchos identifies no

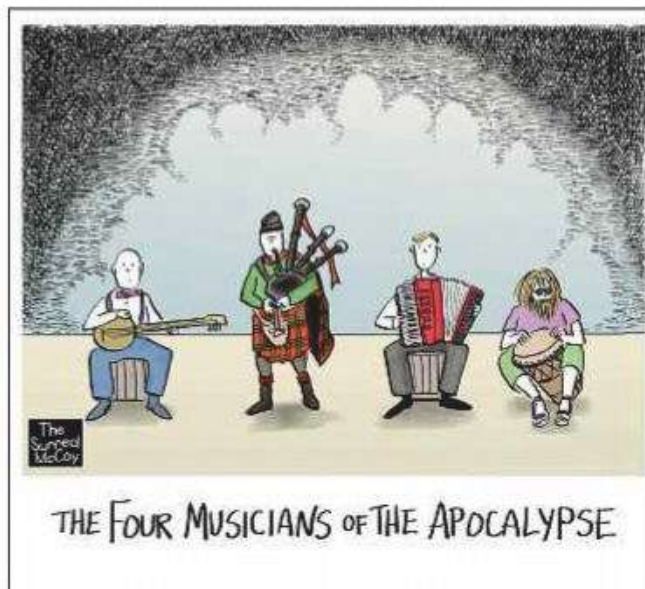
fewer than 32 competing definitions of a species in his 2016 book *Species Concepts in Biology* ('The End of Species', *New Scientist*, 26 Jan 2019.) Another article ('A defining Problem', *New Scientist*, 23 Feb 2019) states: "There is no universal taxonomic authority. Of course, if no one is in charge of taxonomy, that also means that anyone can claim to be. Any taxonomist can publish a paper defining a new species. You don't have to say how or why you made the decision to do so. You don't have to test whether your species exceeds some pre-determined threshold of 'speciesness'. You simply say that it does."

**Philip Bolt**  
Redhall, Kiriemuir

## The Phantom Blot

By a coincidence possibly itself fortian, last week I was reading at the same time *FT381* (containing Theo Paijmans's article on "The Black Flash of Provincetown", pp.32-34) and a hardcover collection of reprints of Floyd Gottfredson's 1930s Mickey Mouse comic strips – volume 5: "Outwits the Phantom Blot". The iconic MM villain "The Phantom Blot" (known just as "The Blot" in this first story) served as the menace in a storyline that ran from 22 May to 9 September 1939. He's depicted as a notably tall figure (taller than the policemen in the story, and at least twice the height of Mickey Mouse). As one of the policemen describes him: "He calls himself the 'BLOT!' and he's always togged out to look solid, dead black with only his eyes showin'! He's plenty weird, I'm telling ye!" The Blot seems to anticipate his opponents' every move, trailing Mickey unseen from only a few feet away, appearing behind him in a taxi and in a motorcycle sidecar, issuing death threats. He's intended to be (and is) more scary than comic: he's willing to set traps involving strangulation (via hangman's noose) and firearms, shoots at Mickey when pursued, and so on.

The Provincetown story cited in Paijmans's story was dated 26 October 1939, a few weeks after the comic strip storyline had concluded. The *Boston Globe* story has a 23 October dateline, though I don't find a year indicated. The latter describes the "Black Flash", also being known as the "Blot", as being reportedly





# LETTERS

“seven feet tall and [wearing] a black hood and long black cape”. Unfortunately, the *Globe* story also claims the Black Flash/Blot sightings had been going on for some eight years, and if so the comic strip cannot have been the original impetus for them. But it sounds as though 1939 was unusually active in sightings and panic, and if so, some of that might have been spurred on by a summer-long adventure strip depicting the dangerous and ubiquitous Gottfredson villain. It would be interesting to know if a Provincetown or vicinity newspaper was carrying the *Mickey Mouse* strip that summer.

**Dennis Lien**

*Minneapolis, Minnesota*

## Uncanny atmosphere

Allow me to recommend the novel *Little Sister Death* by the American author William Gay. The plot lays out certain fortean themes very well while slowly building an uncanny atmosphere. I wouldn't be surprised if the author had been a subscriber and I think many forteans would enjoy this book.

**O Tate**

*Southwick, West Sussex*

## Hoia-Baciu Forest

Chris Hill's article on the Hoia-Baciu Forest [FT382:32-36] caught my interest. This small forest near the Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca is a place that I've considered visiting, but I've been deterred by logistical considerations, my lack of Romanian, and growing doubts about the area's claim to being an anomaly hot spot. Nevertheless, Hill reports that while visiting the forest with a guide (a physicist by background), there was a point when “an inexplicable wind gathered above [their] heads and a distinctly local rustling took place in the nearby canopy”. The guide informed him that the forest had a reputation for draining sources of stored energy. Interestingly, Hill found that the power in his camera, which had been fully



## Pareidolia or spirit face?

We are an amateur group of paranormal investigators called Paranormal Activity Specialists (P.A.S.), non-profit-making and self-funded. On 6 October 2018 we attended a house in the Midlands for an investigation. The owner reports a variety of activity particularly in one specific area. Previously, the house had been a halfway house for waifs and strays and a “bad boy's home”. We took a number of photographs in the area where the owner reported most activity. This simulacrum or spirit face was captured on the full spectrum camera, only noticed a few days later when reviewing the photos.

**Andy Castle**

*Leeds, West Yorkshire*

charged that very morning, had dwindled significantly.

Hill mentions a local chemistry professor, Adrian Patrut, who has written a book on the case, *The Phenomena of the Hoia-Baciu Forest* (1995). Some years ago, I tried emailing him to find out if the book was available in English, but I received no reply. Details of his claims about the forest can be found online.<sup>1</sup> Brian Dunning presents an interesting sceptical appraisal of the case.<sup>2</sup>

Hill explains that there are trees in the Hoia-Baciu Forest with a decidedly strange appearance, which contribute to the atmosphere, creating “a perfect space in which to project one's own desire for some sort of paranormal engagement”. However, it's worth noting that similar-looking trees can also be found in other forests.<sup>3,4</sup> Indeed, even in the UK, one can find trees with a hauntingly surreal appearance, such as in Wistman's Wood on Dartmoor.<sup>5</sup>

### NOTES

**1** Adrian Patrut, ‘Phenomena in the Hoia-Baciu Wood’

[www.lemmingworks.org/weblog/?p=108](http://www.lemmingworks.org/weblog/?p=108)

**2** Brian Dunning, ‘Solving the Haunted Hoia-Baciu Forest’

<https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4520>

**3** Aimee Lamoureux, ‘Poland's Crooked Forest Is Just What It Sounds Like – And Scientists Can't Explain It’

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/crooked-forest-poland-krzywy-las>

**4** ‘Russia's Dancing Forest—An Unexplained Scientific Mystery’

<https://curiosmos.com/russias-dancing-forest-an-unexplained-scientific-mystery/>

**5** Abigail Whyte, ‘Walk: Wistman's Wood, Devon’

<https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/walks/walk-wistmans-wood-devon/>

**Peter A McCue**

*By email*

Regarding Hoia-Baciu and the various unusual phenomena experienced in the area: The following is a link to an article

that could possibly explain some of the noted effects on plants. I often wonder if a plant dug up for replanting is more productive when replanted and oriented in the same direction as before it was uprooted. Limited observations at home lead me to think so. In the Romanian situation, if the plant remains constant but the flux underground changes then that could partially explain the convolving of tree trunks.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2019/07/magma-found-simmering-under-extinct-volcano-what-that-means/>

**Alan R MacKenzie**

*By email*

## The Pear of Destiny

It is taken for granted that the apple is intertwined with human affairs throughout history. Think of Adam and Eve, the apples of the Hesperides, the Beatles' Apple Corps and of course Apple Computer. Now, my research has revealed a much more sinister fruit: The Pear of Destiny. Little is known about this malevolent force, but it appears (pun intended) to be connected with secret societies. How else can you explain the Perry Mason series of books?

The author, Erle Stanley Gardner, was an intrepid explorer (I have myself a copy of his book *Hunting Lost Mines by Helicopter*). I believe he must have stumbled on the truth and used the Perry Mason books to give us coded information about the Pear. His name is itself a veiled reference – ‘Stanley’ is surely a reference to the British cricketer Stanley Peartree (born 1902), and ‘Gardner’ speaks for itself.

The scariest aspect of all this is that Planet Earth itself is slightly pear-shaped. There can be only one explanation for this – and I think we should be very worried. It is vital that the Perry Mason corpus should be examined with an eye to uncovering these secrets – it would be a perfect assignment for Gully Bull.

**Nils Erik Grande**

*Oslo, Norway*



# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

## Death of Uncle Sam

My father was one of five children. When I was a young boy growing up in Leicester in the 1960s, every Christmas would see at least two of the five siblings host parties for all of the extended family and friends, of whom there were many. The parties were of their day, with modest amounts of alcohol being consumed and all of the children present. For many of the guests, these events were the only time they saw each other from one year to the next and were quite well attended.

One year when we were hosting a party, at around 2am after the usual entertainments of playing Pontoon (21 Up) for pennies, and a few classic party games, someone suggested we have a séance. The dining room table was duly cleared and Lexicon cards were used to set the alphabet in an oval shape around the edges of the table, with hand-written “Yes” and “No” markers at each end of the oval. A wine glass was produced and upended in the centre of the oval and everyone assumed the classic position of one finger each on the upturned base. The lights were switched off and the only illumination in the room came from the coal fire in the grate.

The traditional opening of “Is there anybody there?” was said by my father. There was no response initially, so the invocation was repeated. After a while, the glass began to move in small ovals, mimicking the way the alphabet had been laid out. I remember some of the younger women being a bit jumpy and there were the usual accusations of “You’re moving it, Uncle Denis”, quickly followed by the inevitable denial. Once the glass was moving, my father asked who was with us. The glass moved more purposefully and started to move to specific letters, gradually spelling out M-A-G-G-I-E. Maggie was my father’s mother, who I had never known because she’d died of cancer



before I was born. There were some “ooohh’s” and “aahhh’s” at this claim, and so my father asked if Maggie had a message for us. Again, the glass moved to the letters and this time spelled out “H-A-V-E S-A-M C-O-M-E”. The only Sam the people in the room could think of was elderly Uncle Sam of my father’s family, who was in a retirement home and wasn’t able to attend these gatherings. We repeated the message and the glass moved to “Yes” to confirm that it was correct. After that, the glass stopped moving and after a few more attempts at “Is there anybody there?” with no response the séance came to a natural end. The lights were put back on and the glass retrieved from the table and ceremoniously turned the right way up to “release the spirit”, while my cousin’s husband opened a window to “let the spirit out”. I think he was teasing me since I was only about eight years old, but I couldn’t be sure.

As it was now pretty late, the party broke up and the guests left. My parents, not wanting to come down to a sink full of dishes the next day, did the washing up. The last thing to be washed was the glass used for the séance, and whilst it was being cleaned it shattered in the sink. It may have been the temperature shock of being placed in hot water, but none of the others glasses had broken. Everyone agreed it was a bit spooky, and my father speculated that it might have been the vibrations caused by the glass moving on the polished wood

surface of the dining table.

The next morning at around 9:30am we had a call from the nursing home that was looking after Uncle Sam. They told us he’d died in the small hours of that morning at around 3am. That would’ve been around the time the message came through from ‘Maggie’... Even though I’m not remotely religious, in fact atheist if anything, this experience may be why I’d be quite prepared to believe in spirits rather than a God.

**Peter Taberner**

*Solihull, West Midlands*

## Out with a bang

In October 1988, my wife and I bought a house in a small village next to Daventry, Northamptonshire. We are at the edge of the village overlooking extensive mediæval fields, so I assume the house (newly built at the time) sits on these same fields.

In early June 2018, about a month after the completion of a cloakroom-WC extension to make life easier for my elderly father-in-law when he visits us, my wife found the two bedside lights in the spare bedroom unaccountably turned on in the middle of the night. Following this, I spent a week or so having to get up to turn them off. As they were touch lights, I thought that perhaps a mouse was running over the base and turning them on. Finally, the only way I could solve the problem was by unplugging them.

Soon after this, my wife said to me, “I wish you’d stop turn-

ing down the bedclothes in the spare bedroom” – but I hadn’t been in there since unplugging the lights. We’ve had ceiling fans in the bedrooms for 15 years and have always kept them at a low setting, but then both fans in our bedroom and those in the spare bedroom began running at maximum speed. We were only made aware of this by the heightened sound of the fans disturbing us at night. Again, we could find no explanation.

Following this, on coming down one morning, we found the rear cloakroom door locked from the inside. I eventually had to unlock it with a screwdriver. Needless to say, there was no one inside. On another occasion, my wife accused me of opening one of her letters, which I had not touched. The envelope had been deliberately torn open.

One evening sometime later, my wife was using the computer without trouble, but the following morning, when she attempted to go online again, there was no connection. After turning the computer on and off with no response, we sought advice from the supplier, but eventually discovered the router was switched off. It is stuck on a shelf and it is quite difficult to access the on/off button, which in turn is quite hard to press down.

More recent events include the radio, which we always keep tuned to the same station, being tuned to a different station. My wife couldn’t find her glasses, and after hunting high and low they were discovered in the clothespeg basket outside. On 19 June 2019 we got up to find the conservatory doors wide open. Finally, at dusk on 1 August, we both heard a huge bang as if a tyre had exploded. Again, no explanation was forthcoming. The strange phenomena seemed to have stopped for the present. As we tell our friends, we were never unduly concerned. Whatever was behind them seemed merely mischievous.

**John Harner**

*Northamptonshire*



# Fortean Traveller



## 117. The Mediæval Crime Museum, Rothenburg, Germany

**STEVE TOASE** feels the thumbscrews tighten as he explores a grisly collection exploring the history of mediæval torture and its relationship with the law

**R**othenburg is reputed to be the best-preserved mediæval town in Germany and has two museums. The first is a Christmas museum dedicated to all things festive; the second is the Mittelalterliche Kriminalmuseum, or Mediæval Crime Museum. You can guess which one I ended up visiting.

The museum is substantial, with an extensive collection housed in two buildings – St John's Commandery and St John's Barn. Many of the objects on display are concerned with inflicting pain and suffering on people. There are two ways to approach artefacts of this sort. The first is to present them as schlock horror, with mannequins displayed in various states of agony. While this adds some human context to a rack or thumbscrews, the end result can resemble a carnival ghost train rather than offer any gain in empathy and understanding. The second approach is the one taken here, where artefacts are presented in museum cases without any depiction of their use beyond original mediæval illustrations. The danger with this is that the objects can become abstracted from their original horrific purpose; yet, most people have sufficient imagination to understand the devastating impact of an object like a choke pear on the human body.

One of the strengths of the Rothenburg Museum's presentation is the way it contextualises the use of torture within the law of the time by displaying the texts employed to justify it. For example the *Zeugenprotokoll* (Protocol of Witness) stated that testimony from a single witness was not enough for a conviction, but sufficient to allow torture to be

used. To secure a conviction, identical testimonies from two witnesses, or a single testimony and a confession were necessary.

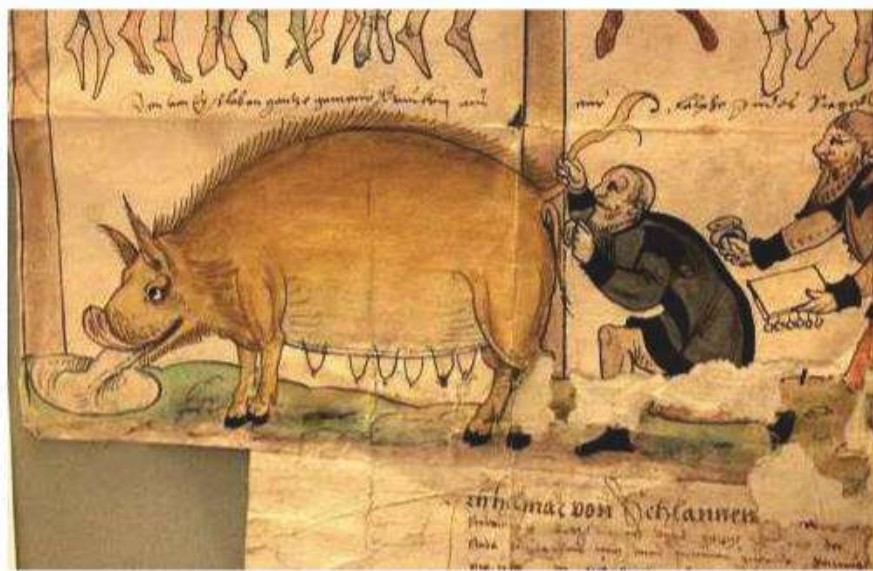
A large section of the museum is dedicated to shame,

and the ways this was inflicted on people. Some of these were straightforwardly physical – for example, the wearing of shame masks – others quite bizarre. One document shows that a debtor could be shamed

by having his wax seal stamp impressed on the behind of a donkey or pig and the stamp hung on a gallows; as a result, the debtor was unable to make a clean seal to honour his obligations.

The practice of shaming went far beyond the masks we see in England, often associated with scold's bridles. Examples on display include a wooden collar to be worn by a seamstress who transgressed mediæval clothing statutes in her own dress, a vast rosary to be worn by someone who had offended God by sleeping in Church, and a series of wooden cards and dice to be placed around the neck of someone who cheated while gambling. Perhaps the museum could be more interactive (I know an interactive Mediæval Crime Museum might not be to everyone's taste) by having replicas of these shame necklaces available so that visitors could try them on; they would be able to experience their weight and imagine the discomfort of having to wear them for long periods of time.

With two specific exhibits



TOP: Strange punishments for debtors. ABOVE: A display of shame masks in the museum.

PHOTOS: STEVE TOASE





PHOTOS: STEVE TOASE

ABOVE LEFT: The Nuremberg Iron Maiden. ABOVE RIGHT: An executioner's mask. BELOW: An illustration from the *Foltergesetz*, or 'Law of Torture'.

the museum takes a very forteen approach. The first is the Nuremberg Iron Maiden. Although rumours abounded about the use of such devices in the mediæval period, it wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that actual examples were discovered; one in Feistritz, Austria, in 1834, and one in Nuremberg.

Rather than using the Iron Maiden to shock visitors, the exhibition explores the history of the artefact and the way it was enhanced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (after possibly starting life as a *shandmantel*, or coat of shame). The museum displays the spikes that were fitted to the inside of the 'maiden' and explains that they have been identified as Napoleonic era bayonets. In addition, the exhibition includes miniatures of the Nuremberg iron maiden and audio of Bram Stoker's "The Squaw", the story that did much to perpetuate the legend. While the exhibition presents the evidence, it leaves enough space for visitors to arrive at their own conclusions.

Another area of controversy the museum tackles is that of executioners' masks. With several examples shown, including one that wouldn't have looked out of place as part of Tin Man's costume in *The Wizard of Oz*, the display explores the question of whether or not they were ever used. For a start, there's the impracticality of trying to make a clean axe cut with obscured vision; and then there's the fact that the executioner would have been

## Bram Stoker's story did much to perpetuate the legend

a public servant and known to the community, presumably rendering the mask ineffective as a disguise.

The museum's position is that the masks originated as shame masks, and if one compares these grotesque head coverings to some others on display, this seems a convincing argument; once again, though, visitors are encouraged to decide for themselves. One item believed to be genuine is an auburn-coloured, late 17<sup>th</sup> century executioner's cloak that, in all honesty, wouldn't have looked out of place in a 1970s New York club.

St John's Barn stands a few metres away from the main museum (just past the ducking stool) and plays host to temporary exhibitions. I visited during the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the Wittenberg's Castle Church door. To mark the occasion, the museum was hosting "With the Sword or Strong Faith: Luther and the Witches". The aim of the exhibition was to explore Luther's attitude to witchcraft in terms of his faith and the law, as well within the wider context



of belief in, and attitudes to, witchcraft. This was mainly done through the contemporary legal texts of the time, although the first few exhibits presented artefacts associated with witchcraft at the time.

Upon entering the Barn, the first exhibit was an audio recording of a whispering female voice. This accompanied the first display case, tracking the history of the word 'witch' to 1300 (alongside a full-sized version of Goya's *Linda maestra*) and the way the legal position on the crime of witchcraft brought together five accusations previously covered by the laws on heresy: casting evil spells; entering into a pact with the Devil; performing sexual communion with the Devil; flying through the air; participating in a witches' Sabbath.

Other display cases contained examples of mandrake, protective spells and artefacts,

and magical protective scrolls, all providing a context for the practice of folk magic before the more in-depth exploration of the legal reaction to the perceived threat of witchcraft. Unsurprisingly, this being a museum dedicated to mediæval crime and law, the vast majority of the exhibits were texts setting out the legal position. Writing that sentence, it all sounds dry as dust, yet nothing could be further from the truth. Each exhibit helped to show the changing attitudes and nuances in the implementation of the law, and the way attitudes changed over time.

For example, the historical background is presented by showing how Pope Innocent III reformed the penal proceedings against clergy in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, bringing in the three procedures of accusation, denunciation and inquisition. This developed over time, and by the 15<sup>th</sup> century a belief in





ABOVE LEFT: Protective warding spells and good luck charms. ABOVE RIGHT: A pamphlet concerning a man who made a pact with the Devil in Mellingen, Thuringia, 1562. BELOW: A series of texts from the 'Bavarian witchcraft war' of 1766, in which scholars argued for or against the existence of witches.

witchcraft started to spread out of the Alpine region, influenced by the Councils of Constance and Basel, feeding belief in a witch sect operating worldwide.

The exhibition displayed several texts particularly influential in the spread of these ideas and the increasing focus on women as practitioners. *Hammer of the Witches* (or *Malleus Maleficarum*, to give it its original title) argued for a significant departure from the position taken so far that witchcraft was a gender-neutral practice. The author, Dominican Inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, focused exclusively on women; he also argued that the Inquisition was not pursuing the perceived sect with enough passion and conceded authority for witch trials to secular judges. The exhibition doesn't mince its words: "Kramer, who showed signs of a perverse personality, authored 'the most malignant book' in history as a reaction to his failed attempts as an Inquisitor in the Alpine region.

He wasn't the only one. The Dominican friar Johannes Nider published *The Formicarius* in 1437. A guide for preachers, it also warned of the threat from the Alpine witch sect, arguing for the reality of flying witches and the pacts with the Devil that lay behind evil spells.

However, attitudes to witchcraft in the 15<sup>th</sup> century should not be seen as homogenous, and one of the strengths of the



## The book warned of a threat from Alpine witches

Kriminalmuseum's exhibition is in presenting differing perspectives. Following Kramer's publication, Ulrich Molitor published *Of Witches and Diviner Women*, where he rejected confessions under torture and described the witches' Sabbath, flying witches and the casting of evil spells as fiction. While this sounds far more moderate than Kramer's position, Molitor still argued for the death for witches due to their fall from faith and collusion with the Devil.

In addition to these texts

that set the legal tone for the mediæval period, the exhibition also included books such as the *Nürnberger Chronik* (1493), which contains an illustration of a witch riding a horse with the Devil, showing how widespread the belief had become.

All of this is scene-setting for the exhibition's main focus: Martin Luther's position on witchcraft. So what view did he take? According to the exhibition, a contradictory one. We are told how both supporters and opponents of the witch hunts used Luther's words to support their arguments. Probably most telling for me was the panel describing how Samuel Meiger drew on one of Luther's conversations to argue for the reality of the Devil's influence, while Godelmann, opposing persecution, used the same story to argue that people who made a pact with the Devil

were ill and needed pastoral care.

The exhibition looks at the various influences on Luther's views of witches, from his father's work as a miner to Augustinian theology. Using over 50 terms to describe witches, Luther returned to the subject again and again, and not only in his formal writings. One of the major parts of the exhibition focuses on Luther's table talks, a series of informal discussions that took place around his dinner table with friends. Not intended for publication, these were nevertheless eventually collected and published in 1566.

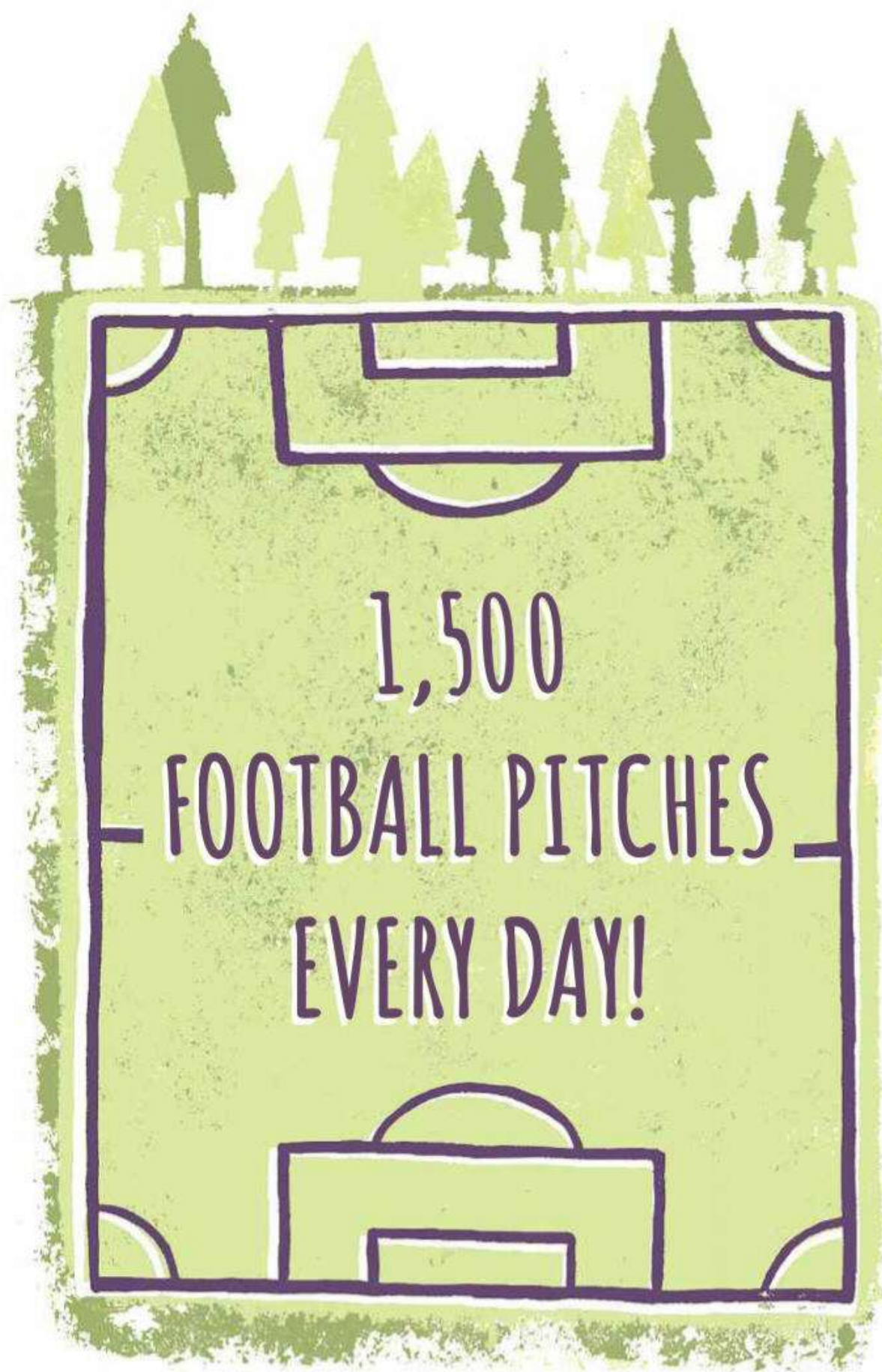
As with the main museum, the Luther and the Witches exhibition was well nuanced and avoided presenting mediæval attitudes to witches as monolithic (see, for example, the influence of Johann Weyer's *De Præstigiis Dæmonum* on various sovereigns who rejected torture and the death penalty following its publication).

Overall, Rothenburg's Kriminalmuseum takes a very fortean approach to accepted truths, and I'd highly recommend a visit.

Mittelalterliche Kriminalmuseum, Burggasse 3-5, 91541 Rothenburg ob der Tauber. Info & opening times: [www.kriminalmuseum.eu](http://www.kriminalmuseum.eu)

♦ STEVE TOASE lives in Munich and writes for Fortean Times and other publications. More at [www.stevetoase.wordpress.com](http://www.stevetoase.wordpress.com).





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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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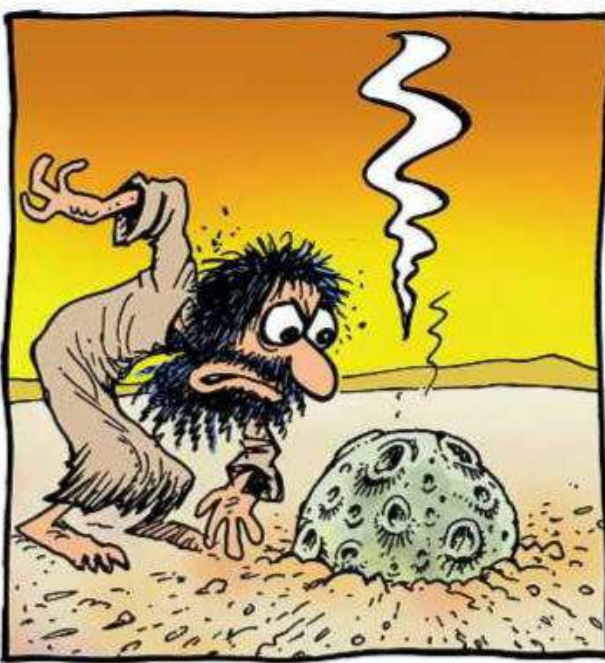


AN ANCIENT PERSON IN AN ANCIENT LAND IS ALONE IN THE DESERT! HE HAS A FRUSTRATING PERSONAL PROBLEM...

AW MAN! I JUST WANNA BE THE BOSS OF EVERYBODY, BUT THEY WON'T TAKE ME SERIOUSLY!

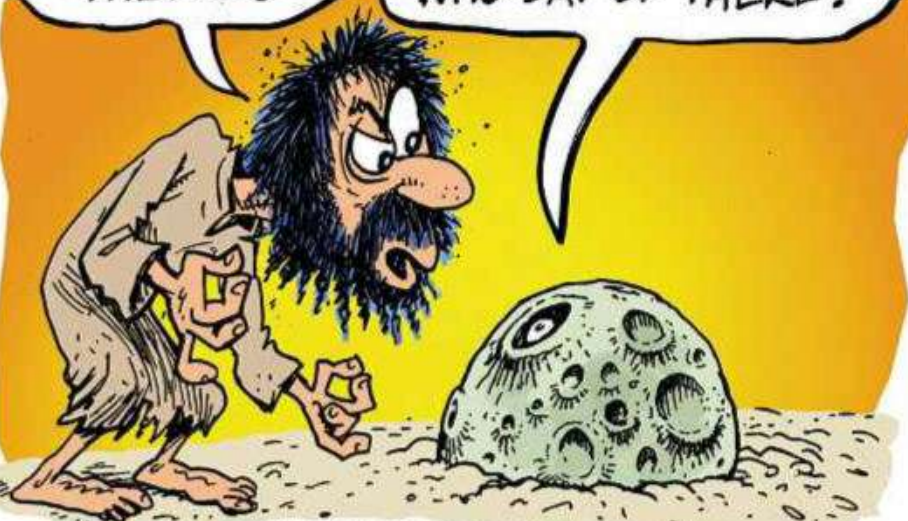


HO-LY SHIT!!



HEY MAN! WHO DAT DOWN THERE?

I MIGHT ASK YOU THE SAME QUESTION- WHO DAT UP THERE?



HMMM! A CONUNDRUM THAT COULD KEEP MY PEOPLE IN SUBJUGATION FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS!



AND SO, TO THE SOUND OF THE WOODY HERMAN BAND, HISTORY BEGINS...



OK- I WANT A BIG VERSION OF ME- HUGE, RIGHT? FOR ME TO STAND ON!

EEK! OK BOSS!

RIGHT AWAY!

I'LL GET THEM ONTO IT!



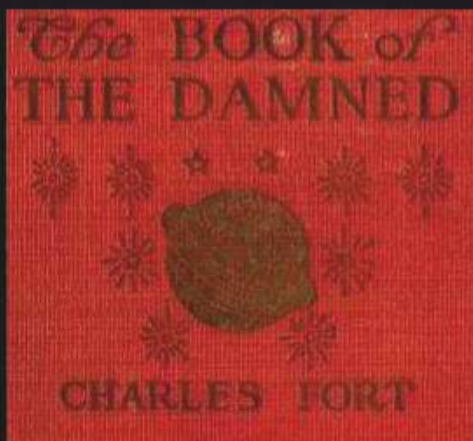


# COMING NEXT MONTH



## MUMMYMANIA

EMPIRE AND THE EVOLUTION OF  
THE EGYPTIAN GOTHIC



## 100 YEARS AGO TODAY

A CENTURY OF CHARLES  
FORT'S BOOK OF THE DAMNED



THE ART OF MOEBIUS,  
GIANT BIRD SIGHTINGS,  
THE BISHOP'S TORPEDO  
AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 386

ON SALE 7 NOV 2019

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A university student broke open the door of a plane and leapt to her death from 3,500ft (1,070m) in Madagascar on 25 July. Alana Cutland, 19, from Milton Keynes, fought off the only other passenger, her friend Ruth Johnson, 51, who battled for several minutes to keep her in the Cessna C168 light aircraft. The tiny propeller plane was rocking as Ruth gripped Alana's leg and the pilot tried to pull the door shut in a bid to stop her fatal plunge, but she broke free and fell into jungle in the remote Analalava region. She uttered not a word during the struggle. "It is extraordinarily difficult to push open a door during a flight when a plane is going at 120 knots," said an air expert. "You have to have a lot of strength and be really determined to do that." The sort of strength, in fact, exhibited by someone undergoing a severe psychotic episode. Alana's body was found on 6 August and was later flown to the capital Antananarivo for autopsy.

Studying biological natural sciences at Robinson College, Cambridge, Alana had been due to stay for six weeks, doing an internship with researchers at Anjajavy nature reserve to make a study of crabs on the shoreline, but cut the visit short after eight days, having spoken to her parents, who arranged for her flight home. Ms Johnson, a teacher from Banbury, Oxfordshire, had been asked by Alana's parents to accompany her on the first leg of her flight home. "[Alana] had personally financed her research," said police chief Spinola Nomenjanahary, "and had suffered a paranoia attack five times." At one point, she became so disoriented and confused she feared being jailed if she failed to complete her project. The discovery of anti-malarial medication doxycycline and Lariam (generic name mefloquine) in her luggage suggested an explanation: Lariam is notorious for side effects such as psychosis, suicidal thoughts, depression and hallucinations. In 1990 the comedian Paul Merton took Lariam for a trip to Kenya and developed paranoia about being "a target for the Freemasons". He was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for six weeks as a result. *Sun*, 1+2+3 Aug; *Metro*, 1 Aug; *D.Telegraph*, 3+7 Aug; *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 Aug 2019.

On 16 June, Chanchal Lahiri, 40, an Indian escapologist, was lowered by crane from a boat into the Hooghly River in West Bengal. In a bid to recreate Harry Houdini's world-

famous trick, the 40-year-old – who performed under the stage name 'Jadugar Mandrake' (Wizard Mandrake) – was shackled with six locks and a chain as spectators on two boats watched him. A crowd had also gathered on the riverbank and some stood on Kolkata's Howrah Bridge. His arms and legs were tied with rope and he was blindfolded. He was meant to escape and swim to safety, but when he failed to reappear after 10 minutes, spectators alerted the police, who launched a search operation. His body washed up some 1km (0.6 miles) from the site of the stunt, where it was found the next day. This was not the first time that Lahiri had attempted a risky underwater trick. More than 20 years ago, he was lowered into the same river, shackled inside a glass box, but managed to escape to safety. *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, 17 June; *Guardian*, 18 June 2019.

Last year, Simone Stapley, 34, was bitten on her finger by her pet rat. The care worker from Abingdon, Oxfordshire, ignored NHS advice to see her GP and died of a heart attack in hospital four days later, on 7 November 2018. A post-mortem exam found she was infected with *Streptobacillus moniliformis*, commonly known as rat bite fever. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, headaches and muscle pain while complications can lead to infections of the lungs, liver and heart. The illness is very rare in the UK, while in the US only about 200 cases have been recorded since 1839. *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 27 June 2019.

Under the headline "Nun was beheaded 'to bring luck'", the *Times* (24 May 2019) tells the tale of Sister Inés Nieves Sancho, 77, a Spanish nun decapitated in Nola, a remote village the Central African Republic, on 19 May, possibly as part of a pagan ritual. "In this area on the border with Cameroon there are diamond mines and there are people who use witchcraft," said Bishop Juan José Aguirre, 64, who has worked in the country for 19 years. "They believe that fresh blood, including that from human beings, brings luck in the hunt for these precious stones." Since the overthrow in 2013 of former President Bozizé, a Christian, by mainly Muslim Séléka rebels, about 80 per cent of the country has been under the control of armed groups fighting for control of its mineral wealth.





# Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



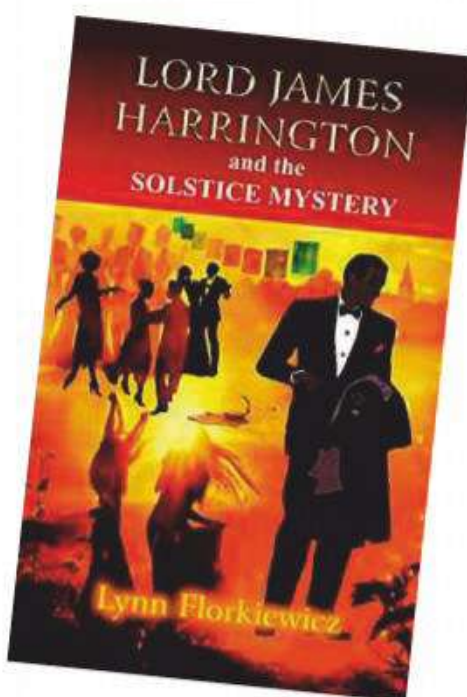
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on nine book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a tenth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well

as from Lord Harrington's very own website: [www.lordjamesharrington.com](http://www.lordjamesharrington.com).

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: [www.writersbureau.com](http://www.writersbureau.com) or call – 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT19

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